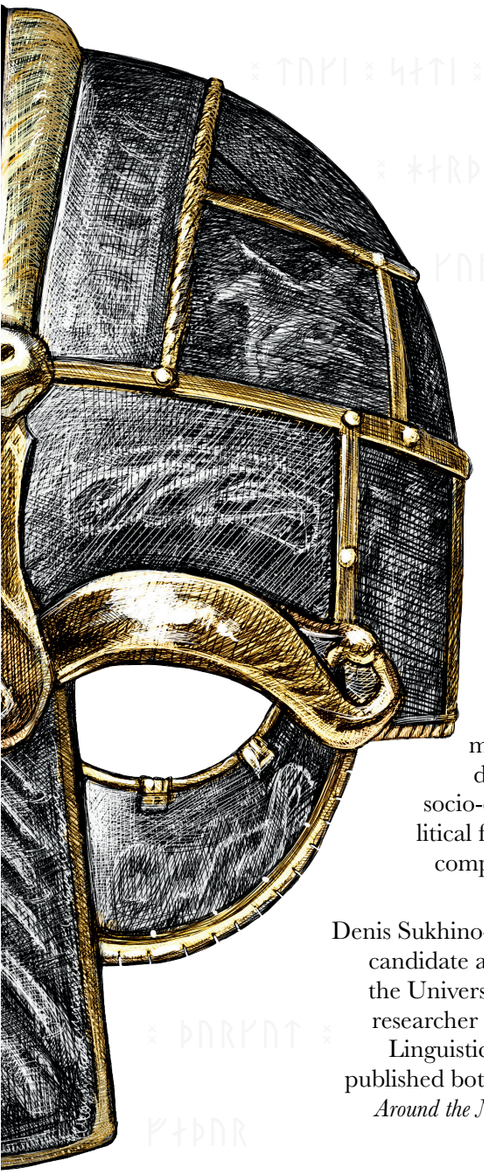

‘A twelve-hundred man is a person of noble rank, that is, a *thegn*, whose wergeld is twelve hundred shillings, which equal twenty-five pounds.’ – *Leges Henrici Primi* 76:4a (1108 × 1118 AD)

‘Útlagi raised this stone in memory of Eyvindr, a very good *thegn*.’ – Vg 62 (*c.* 980 × 1015 AD)

Arguably, outside Shakespeare’s writings, *thegns* (or “thanes”), are commonly associated with pre-Norman aristocracy and nobility in England before 1066 AD. However, around the year 1000 AD, at least 45 known rune stones in modern-day Sweden and Denmark were also raised in memory of *thegns*. Scholars of Old Norse literature recognise them from contemporaneous poetry and later sagas. This investigation, written equally for specialists in early English and early Scandinavian histories by a student of both, comprehensively brings together evidence about *thegns* from the two regions for the first time. Utilising the semasiological potential of digital corpora of ancient languages, the book revisits some crucial primary sources. An academic challenge to traditional interpretations, it offers new insights into the roles of *thegns*, contributing to our understanding of post-Roman social structures and to interpretive methodologies of runic evidence. By nuancing the place of the term *thegn* in the early medieval socio-conceptual landscape and of the *thegnly* social elites in the socio-political fabric on both coasts of the North Sea, this study enhances modern comprehension the complexities of kingship, land ownership, and social dynamics of the period.

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ISBN: 978-91-8069-807-8 (print)
ISBN: 978-91-8069-808-5 (e-book)

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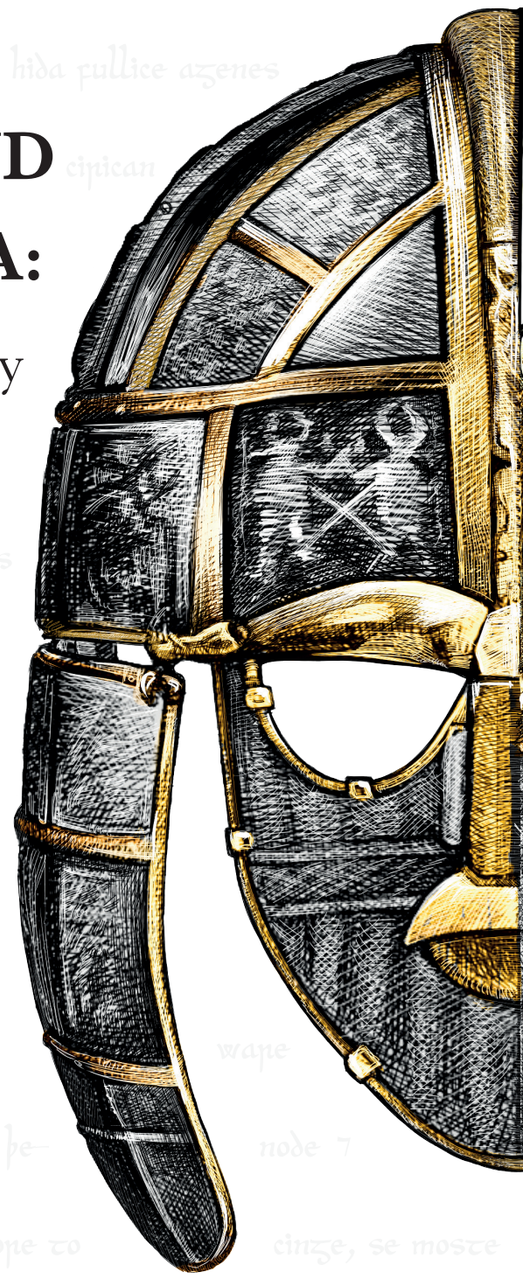

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Department of Historical Studies

THEGNS AROUND THE NORTH SEA:

Elite, Nobility, Aristocracy of the Late Viking Age

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2024

The work on this doctoral research was partially funded by *Kungl. och Hvitfeldtska stiftelsen*

Doctoral thesis in History
University of Gothenburg, Department of Historical Studies
Edition for the *viva* (disputationsupplaga). Printed by Stema Specialtryck AB (Borås)
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Cover illustration:
Original work, graphic design, and practical execution by
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Back cover photo of the author:
Courtesy of the photo session at the University of Gothenburg, Department of Historical Studies. Photo by Gunnar Jönsson

ISBN: 978-91-8069-807-8 (print)
ISBN: 978-91-8069-808-5 (e-book)

A digital copy of this book is available at:
<https://hdl.handle.net/2077/81920>

ABSTRACT

This book is a study of *thegns* in late Anglo-Saxon England and Viking-Age Scandinavia. It is catalysed by a particular runological problem of interpreting people called *thegns* in a handful of runic inscriptions from the period around the year 1000 AD. Re-assessing *thegns* possesses cross-disciplinary value. In particular, it offers new insights into the social order of the two interconnected regions and the interconnectedness itself. The book emphasises that on both coasts of the North Sea, *thegns* as a socio-conceptual phenomenon owed its appearance to concrete historical processes, as did the shifting social meanings imbued in this word.

The dissertation consists of five CHAPTERS that contain the main research and is supplemented by five accessory VIGNETTES to help readers traverse the potentially unfamiliar historical ground. Two EXCURSUSES interlaced between the CHAPTERS review related to *thegns* and previously often examined matters but not considered of decisive argumentative importance.

After articulating the problem and its relevance, CHAPTER 1 formulates three research QUESTIONS on: 1) the social structures communicated through OE/ON *þegn*; 2) the power distribution illuminated by the social, legal, economic, and political circumstances surrounding *thegns*; and 3) the of interaction between England and Scandinavia exemplified by tentative answers to the former two. The chapter then maps the historical and theoretical background for these answers, as well as the applied methodology, and design of the study. One of the key methodological advancements of this work is the pursuit of maximising the range of textual sources with the aid of digital language corpora. The other is to elucidate the meanings of original lexemes before engaging problematic sources.

The two halves of CHAPTER 2 outline the Anglophone and Scandinavian historiographical backgrounds to the study and the current state of the art, respectively. Each half first summarises previous scholarship on *thegns* and then points out the potential hurdles in interpreting some of the primary sources. In the case of early medieval England, the effect of Archbishop Wulfstan of York's (d. 1023) influential and explanatory but potentially misleading texts are given primacy. For Scandinavia, the chapter examines the scholarly reliance on post-Viking-Age English written sources and native toponymic material.

The answers to research QUESTIONS 1 and 2 established in CHAPTER 3 are that OE *þegn*'s semantical core connoted non-humiliating service performed by a free man in respect of a lord and that from the start such lord was most commonly a king. The chapter argues that on its own, OE *þegn* did not possess enough semantic force to connote any other social category/group. A semantic widening of OE *þegn* to connote lay landowning aristocratic elites more generally owed to the social process of kings' co-optation of them. Royal lordship is seen as one of the crucial means of such co-optation. Importantly, in the late Anglo-Saxon period royal lordship proceeded from tenurial relationships as much as from interpersonal ones. The process of co-optation was lexically conveyed through royal officialese in *lex scripta* and chancery products, with "bookland" being the most common term for encumbered land and "*thegn*" for its owner. The chapter locates the start of these processes already in the reign of King Alfred (r. 871–899). The chapter re-integrates Wulfstan's problematic writings and illuminates both their guiding and misleading potentials. Establishing whether or not such elites became a historical ontology by internalising the

thegnly identity as master status would require more ego-documents. As the matter stands, this book advises caution.

Chapter 4 answers research Questions 1 and 2 by demonstrating that on *þegn* only marginally and rarely stood for a "servant" of any kind. Instead, this lexeme connoted generic lay elites and kings' junior partners (liegemen, later reconceptualised as king's subjects), and these senses circulated independently of each other. The chapter argues that common to them was an economic power base in form of ancestral unencumbered landed property under the umbrella term "odal". The chapter then investigates the social status group of the *hǫldar*, who were later associated with odal, and the apparently same elites under various other names. The conclusion is that Scandinavian kings, best known through their Norwegian examples, strove to turn the elites into liegemen. The probable mechanism may have proceeded from expanding royal lordship and turning heterarchical relationships into hierarchical ones and encumbering the elites' landed properties, which later historical tradition conceptualised as reduction to servitude. The chapter provides examples of such expansion and suggests that the conversion of royal lordship from personal and contractual to de-personified and unconditional led to on *þegn*'s further semantic widening to connote a king's subject in the high Middle Ages. The chapter concludes by returning to the problematic rune stones that mention *thegns*. Rather than as kings' agents, the contextual and syntactical non-arbitrariness of *þegn*'s sense "liegeman" in both Old English and Old Norse strongly situates runic *thegns* in the received form as social elites, which well matches the overall context of such runic monuments.

Chapter 5 summarises these conclusions and highlights their crucial points. In answer to Question 1, this doctoral research posits that the pre-Conquest English social order was strongly underpinned by monarchocentric discourse, whereas the same cannot be said of Scandinavia. Concerning Question 2, this book demonstrates that the monarch-oriented discourse could mould the actual social conditions in England, and emphasises the need to recognise the bias imbued in the word "*thegn*" as a social term. As for Scandinavia, the chapter highlights a social landscape that was far less permeated by kingship or its tools of governance, which also prompts the understanding of *thegns* commemorated on rune stones as local notables. Answering Question 3, the concluding section of Chapter 5 harmonises the forerunning conclusions and maintains that the North-Sea chronotope during the latter part of the Viking Age was intricately connected and social ideas could easily traverse the geographic boundaries. This research entertains the possibility that Old Norse could have inherited and adapted the senses of late oe *þegn* in a received form, which explains their irreducibility to one or the other and parallel circulation. The chapter hypothesises that a continuous penetration of the Old Norse ecumene by oe *þegn* occurred, with two peaks: first at the turn of the 9th–10th centuries and then at the turn of the 10th–11th centuries.

SAMMANFATTNING

Denna bok är en studie av *thegnar* i sen-anglosaxiska England och vikingatidens Skandinavien. Studien har sin utgångspunkt i ett specifikt problem inom runologin, nämligen att tolka vilka det är som kallas *thegnar* på en handfull runstenar från perioden cirka år 1000 e.Kr. Omvärderingen av dessa *thegnar* är tvärvetenskapligt relevant. Den kan framför allt bidra med nya insikter rörande den sociala ordningen i de två sammanlänkade regionerna (England och Skandinavien), och om relationerna mellan dem. Undersökningen understryker att på båda sidor om Nordsjön var *thegnar* som sociokulturellt fenomen sitt ursprung i konkreta historiska processer, precis som de skiftande sociala betydelser som ordet genomsyrades av.

Avhandlingen består av fem KAPITEL som innehåller själva analysen. De kompletteras med fem tillbehörande VIGNETTER för att hjälpa läsaren att orientera sig i den potentiellt obekanta historiska terrängen. I två EXKURSER som infogats mellan KAPITLEN granskas frågor som ofta diskuterats i relation till *thegn*-fenomenet, men som inte har betraktas att vara av avgörande argumentativ betydelse.

Efter att ha redogjort för forskningsproblemet och dess relevans formulerar KAPITEL 1 tre FORSKNINGSFRÅGOR: 1) om de sociala strukturer som kommuniceras genom det fornengelska/fornnordiska *þegn*; 2) om maktförhållanden som belyses av de sociala, juridiska, ekonomiska och politiska omständigheterna som omgärdar *thegnarna*; och 3) om interaktion mellan England och Skandinavien som exemplifieras av de tentativa svaren på de två förstnämnda frågorna. Kapitlet ger såväl en historisk som en teoretisk bakgrund, presenterar undersökningens metodik och utformning. Ett av de främsta metodiska framstegen i detta arbete är det systematiska användandet av digitala textbanker för att maximera antalet textkällor. Ett annat är att belysa innebörden av de ursprungliga lexemen innan de mer problematiska källorna behandlas.

De två delarna av KAPITEL 2 redogör för den engelskspråkiga respektive den skandinaviska forskningshistoriken och forskningsläge. Vardera halvan sammanfattar först tidigare forskning om *thegnar*, och identifierar därefter problemen när det gäller tolkningen vissa primära källor. I fallet med det tidigmedeltida England fokuseras på ärkebiskop Wulfstan av Yorks (d. 1023) inflytelserika och förklarande men även potentiellt vilseledande texter. Beträffande Skandinavien undersöks i kapitlet den vetenskapliga tilliten till engelska skriftliga källor från tiden efter vikingatiden, liksom till inhemskt ortnamnsmaterial.

Svaren på FORSKNINGSFRÅGORNA 1 och 2 som etableras i KAPITEL 3 är att den semantiska kärnan i fornengelskans *þegn* betecknar en icke-förnedrande tjänst utförd av en fri man i respekt för en herre som ifrån början vanligen var en kung. Kapitlet argumenterar för att fornengelskans *þegn* i sig inte hade tillräcklig semantisk styrka för att beteckna någon annan social kategori/grupp. En semantisk utvidgning av fornengelskans *þegn* till att beteckna jordägande aristokratiska eliter mer allmänt berodde på den sociala process där kungarna samverkade med *thegnarna*. Kunglig överhöghet ses som ett av de viktigaste medlen för sådan samverkan. Det är viktigt att notera att under den sen-anglosaxiska perioden utgick det kungliga herraväldet från såväl äganderättsliga som mellanmänskliga relationer. Samverkansprocessen avspeglades lexikalt genom kunglig officiell terminologi i *lex scripta* och kansliprodukter, där ”bookland” var den vanligaste termen för belastad mark och termen ”thegn” för dess ägare. I kapitlet argumenteras för att början av dessa processer går att

identifiera redan under kung Alfreds regeringstid (871–899). Sist återintroducerar kapitlet Wulfstans problematiska skrifter och belyser både deras vägledande och vilseledande potential. För att fastställa om sådana eliter blev en historisk ontologi genom att internalisera *thegn*-identiteten som sin ledande status (eng. *master status*) skulle fler ego-dokument krävas. Som läget nu är, manar denna bok till försiktighet härvid.

KAPITEL 4 besvarar FORSKNINGSFRÅGORNA 1 och 2 genom att visa att det fornnordiska *þegn* endast marginellt och sällan betecknade en ”tjänare” av något slag. Istället refererade detta lexem till allmänna världsliga eliter och kungars underordnade partner (läntagare, eng. *liegemen*, senare omdefinierade som kungens undersåtar), och dessa betydelser cirkulerade oberoende av varandra. Kapitlet finnerf att det gemensamma för dem var en ekonomisk maktbas i form av förfäders obelastade markegendom under paraplytermen ”odal”. Kapitlet undersöker sedan den sociala statusgruppen *hǫldar*, som senare förknippades med odal, och de till synes identiska eliterna under olika andra namn. Slutsatsen är att skandinaviska kungar, främst kända genom de norska exemplen, strävade efter att förvandla sådana eliter till sina läntagare. Den sannolika förvandlingsmekanismen kan ha utgått från det utökat kungligt herravälde som omvandlade heterarkiska relationer till hierarkiska och belastade eliternas markegendomar, vilket i senare historisk tradition uppfattades som en reducering till ”träldom”. Kapitlet ger exempel på en sådan expansion och föreslår att omvandlingen av kungligt herravälde från personligt och kontraktsbundet till depersonifierat och ovillkorligt innebar en ytterligare semantisk breddning av det fornnordiska *þegn* till att under högmedeltiden innebära en kungens undersåte. Kapitlet avslutar med att återvända till de problematiska runstenarna som nämner *thegnar*. Den kontextuella och icke godtyckliga betydelsen av *þegn* som ”läntagare”, i både fornengelska och fornnordiska, placerar runstenarnas *thegnar* inom ramen för sociala eliter, vilket överensstämmer väl med den övergripande sociala kontexten för runstenar.

KAPITEL 5 sammanfattar dessa slutsatser och framhåller deras avgörande punkter. Som svar på FORSKNINGSFRÅGA 1, hävdar denna doktorsavhandling att den engelska samhällsordningen före den normandiska erövringen var starkt underbyggd av en monarkocentrisk diskurs, medan detsamma inte kan sägas om Skandinavien. När det gäller FORSKNINGSFRÅGA 2, visar undersökningen att den monarkorienterade diskursen kunde forma de faktiska sociala förhållandena i England. Boken betonar behovet av att erkänna att ordet ”þegn” som social term är historiskt villkorat. När det gäller Skandinavien belyser kapitlet ett socialt landskap som var mycket mindre genomsyrat av kungadömet och dess styrmedel, vilket får betydelse för förståelsen av runstenarnas *thegnar* som framförallt lokala stormän. Genom att besvara FORSKNINGSFRÅGA 3 sammanfattar den avslutande delen av KAPITEL 5 de tidigare slutsatserna och hävdar att Nordsjöområdet under den senare delen av vikingatiden var intrikat sammanvävt. Sociala idéer kunde lätt korsa geografiska gränser. Avhandlingens resultat indikerar att det fornnordiska språket kan ha tagit upp och anpassat betydelser av den sena fornengelskans *þegn* i former som förklarar deras ömsesidiga stabilitet, oavhängighet av varandra och den parallella cirkulationen. Kapitlet formulerar en hypotes om en kontinuerlig påverkan på det fornnordiska samhället från fornengelskans *þegn* med två toppar, först vid skiftet mellan 800- och 900-talen och sedan vid skiftet mellan 900- och 1000-talen.

To my family for shaping the person I have become; to my loved ones for their endless care and constant presence in my life; to my colleagues, teachers, and friends for imparting knowledge, their embracing of and supporting me; and to all those who, too, made this book possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before the adoption of the BA–MA education model, second-year students at the Faculty of History in my *alma mater* were asked to choose one of the sixteen departments in which to develop their researcher profile. I opted for the study of pre-Norman English history at the Department of Medieval History. Next September, my newly approved mentor asked me what subject I wanted to focus on in my new academic family. I replied that I had quite enjoyed writing on knighthood the previous year. "The closest Anglo-Saxon thing I can think of," she said pensively, "would probably be *thegnship*. Would you like to try it?" This serendipitous proposition of hers at our first supervision meeting determined my first research topic, which I then continued into my postgraduate years. Bringing it to fruition would not have been possible without the backing, guidance, and contributions of many individuals and institutions. The appreciation that follows is for them:

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors throughout those years for all their pedagogical input, continuous support, toleration of my temper, and belief in me. Zoya Metlitskaya, who initially mentioned *thegns* as a research object to me, introduced me to the Old English studies and guided to my first successful graduation. Shortly before, Steffen Patzold stepped in and first mentored me, if briefly, into the European academic environment. Elena Melnikova then gave me the opportunity to acclimatise myself to intricacies of a postgraduate career. En route, my *Doktormutter* kindly recommended me to Michael Lerche Nielsen who took me under his caring wing and promoted my initial Scandinavian studies. When I arrived in Gothenburg, Lars Hermanson and Henrik Janson shouldered the burden of successfully leading me towards the completion of my doctoral project. To them I owe me standing on my feet as a historian and maturation as a researcher. Judith Jesch, although not formally a supervisor at any point, provided important consultancy as a rare specialist in *thegnly* studies, for which I am immensely grateful.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to Gillian Fellows-Jensen and the late Niels Lund, with whom I shared my vision of the thesis back in 2015, and to Peder Gammeltoft for his critical assessment of my Ph.D. application. Since then, many a colleague helped me shape my research in their roles as seminar reviewers: Peder Flemestad, Lena Strid, Lewis Webb, Frida Espolin Norstein, Daniel Zackrisson, Wojtek Jezierski, Benjamin Husvik, Katherine Cross, and of course Thomas Lindkvist. Their feedback was critical in refining my thesis. Besides them, my thanks are directed at colleagues who out of friendship kindly read and commented on various fragments from my ever-expanding manuscript and build-up articles (in no particular order): Ann Williams, Alex Woolf, Ruarigh Dale, Matthew Delvaux, Danielle Cudmore, Albert Fenton, Daria Segal, Gwendolyne Knight, Frog, Philip Lavander, Beñat Elortza Larrea, and many others. Albert Fenton also engaged in discussions on Anglo-Saxon diplomatics in which he specialises. Many senior colleagues also lent their expertise in various historical subjects: Rory Naismith in handling monetary issues; Tom Lambert in examining my source criticism; Richard Abels in exchanging ideas about military systems; Andrew Rabin in approaching the Wulfstania; Jørn Øyrehagen Sunde in helping to untangle certain complex legal procedures; Magnus Källström, Henrik Williams, and Sofia Pereswetoff-Morath in consulting on some runological issues; Klas Hjortstam in suggesting some literature; Ian Wood in general discussions. Conversations

with Seán Vrieland, Alexander Mankov, and Guus Kroonen were indispensable to filter out my weakest and least tenable linguistic ideas. All my fellow-doctoral students at the University of Gothenburg and beyond have been and always will be my academic brothers and sisters, through thick and thin. I probably owe my becoming one of them in the first place to Sonia Tolmacheva and Pavol Jakubec. To Pavol's sympathetic ear I further owe a great deal of extra-academic support, and to his in-depth knowledge of the Bible a lot of my understanding of this source. Richard Purkiss was a delight to discuss with the matters of early medieval royal lordship. Olga Kabitova has since the start, effectively, tutored me in the medieval *lingua franca* and polished my Latin from the rust that had corroded it over a few years of disuse. Soon after she was joined by Daria Segal who did the same with my Old Norse that I had not systematically studied before. Jake Stattel and Lewis Webb deserve a special thanks. Jake not only lent me his expertise on some "Danelaw" matters, but also has been a pivotal liaison with a great many colleagues I couldn't dream of establishing good contacts with. Lewis, as already mentioned, was among my seminar reviewers, and at the last stages also dedicated his literary talents to meticulously proofread and improve my manuscript before print.

Any historian preparing a book for publication knows that a simple familiarity with and command of ancient sources can't do it alone. The IT Department at the University of Gothenburg, and Richard Andersson together with Tiffany Hurtig, ensured a smooth running of my machines and software using their computer magic. Mehdi Ghanimifard, for acquaintance with whom I thank our mutual colleague and friend Vlad Maraev, developed a solution to substitute a single unified corpus of the Old Norse language. At one point of serious doubts regarding the design and depth of my study, Mehdi was also the person to re-install my confidence by wisely noting that, "If it's a topic that fits a job of a thesis, it cannot be simpler than it already is". I must equally and wholeheartedly thank Thomas Ekholm and Anna Frolova for all their invaluable artistic skills coupled with patience they lent to produce the maps for this book. Some creative choices provoked various opinions among us, and I assume all less apt decisions as my own only. To Thomas, Lise-Lotte Walter, and my sister Elizaveta Sukhino-Khomenko I'm further grateful for helping me with the layout and typeset of this book.

The support from the libraries of the University of Gothenburg and the University of Copenhagen, which provided numerous books and where I conducted extensive research, was indispensable. I extend my gratitude to the conference organisers who provided platforms for me to present my research: the Universities of Nottingham, Moscow, Tartu, Aarhus, Cambridge, and Durham, National Research University Higher School of Economics, as well as the conveners of the multitude of online conferences and seminars I was in luck to attend and speak at.

To The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and Rochester Cathedral I give special thanks for their kind permission to reproduce facsimile images of some of the manuscripts in their collections.

Thanks to the *Nationella Forskarskolan i Historiska Studier* (based at Lund University) for their courses and *internats*, I was given an opportunity to both refine my research and establish valuable connections through their network. More than that, the *Forskarskolan* sponsored some of my academic visits abroad, which would have otherwise been impossible. The same can be said about the *Nordiskt Forum för Kultur*, *Kungl. och Hvitfeldtska stiftelsen*, Roskilde

University, and the Danish Government, who all offered their generous scholarships that provided occasional financial support throughout my research. On this note, lest a great ingratitude is served, I must thank my teachers of the Danish language at my *alma mater*: Anastasiya Dieva and Elvira Krylova. Without their pedagogics, I would never have acquired enough command of my first Nordic language, nor would I build up the courage to apply for a Danish stipend (of which I also learnt from them).

Lastly, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who stood by me, both professionally and personally, throughout this journey. My family and loved ones have always been there for me. They neither ever stopped supporting my anything-but-easy-to-explain will to carry out doctoral research in anything-but-a-common-knowledge field; nor have they ever let me down.

To reformulate one modern opinion leader and online educator, "No man writes alone". This work would not have been possible without the support and contributions of all those mentioned and many others who have been part of this incredible journey.

All factual, linguistic, typographic, and other mistakes that readers may come across this book are mine alone.

Gothenburg,
June 2024

PREFACE

During my undergraduate studies of the early English aristocracy in the early 2010s, I discovered that, despite what the title of my diploma thesis claimed, my focus had predominantly been on Wessex rather than England as a whole, as a significant portion of the sources I worked with primarily related to the "Saxon" part of the kingdom. This was evident both qualitatively – with Old English best attested by West Saxon authors – and quantitatively, as sources like the invaluable extant royal diplomas left the eastern shires comparatively uncovered. Studies in the preceding decades had emphasised the uneven social, cultural, religious, linguistic, and economic fabric of what modern historians conventionally call "(late) Anglo-Saxon/pre-Norman England". The active and intense (and not always welcome) contacts between the British Isles and Scandinavia led to the creation of an idiosyncratic contact zone, the so-called "Danelaw" in the eastern shires. Here, the local order did not always match that of Wessex. At the same time, it is noticeable that despite such discrepancies, one original native lexeme, *thegn* (rhymes with "rain"), was used indiscriminately in modern scholarly literature in respect of *all* Anglo-Saxon lay aristocratic elites, regardless of time and place. Fresh from university, as a postgraduate student, I began reading up on both the "Danelaw" and Viking-Age Scandinavia. At this stage of my life as a historian, I realised that a simple "reading up" was not enough and I needed to develop a second, Scandinavian research profile. To my Anglo-Saxonist surprise, I soon learnt that *thegns* were known from contemporaneous Western and Southern Scandinavian rune stones. These individuals' exact social identity, I also learnt, had sparked much disunity in the Nordic scholarship on the Viking Age. This has been not least thanks in large to the attempts at comparison with the Anglo-Saxon *thegns*, who have so far been studied in isolation from their Scandinavian counterparts. Desiring to address this cluster of interwoven problems, I conceived of comparative and re-evaluative research that would equally attend to both British and Scandinavian sources on *thegns*. My primary interest was in elucidating what their presence on both coasts of the North Sea reveal about this epoch. This book is the result of this research during my Ph.D. studies.

"Learn from the best", – so the proverbial wisdom goes. To some extent, this study envisions itself as building on Susan Reynolds's seminal *Fiefs and Vassals* (1994). Specifically, a methodological echo of her book's Chapter 2 can be heard, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon part. Reynolds built a strong case for the need to revisit the notions and use of "vassal(age)" as modern analytical terms. Among her arguments, she identified a serious gap between what these words signified in medieval sources and how they are used in modern scholarly literature. Her "crusade" against "feudalism" has provoked a good number of fruitful discussions. Despite many a dissenting opinion (including my own in Chapter 3 in respect to some of her handling of the English pre-Conquest evidence on land tenure), Reynolds's work remains a valuable warning against such conflations.

Another template for this study was *The Empire of Cnut the Great* (2009) by Timothy Bolton. In his pursuit of a better reconstruction of the power within and political architecture of King Cnut's realm, Bolton divided his book into two equal parts – English and Scandinavian. A disposition such as this seems most optimal for a transregional study. His work additionally highlights the interconnectedness of the early medieval North Sea region, and so, hopefully, does mine. Judith Jesch's monograph *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age*

(2001) largely influenced my treatment of skaldic poems. It illustrates their potential to answer some questions other historical sources cannot. Beyond that, Jesch's study generally informed mine as to how to compare runic and skaldic evidence. The inclusion of separate sections on the historical background to the study performed in *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (2015) by George Molyneaux, in *The Headless State* (2007) by David Sneath, and in both my supervisors' own doctoral dissertations also prompted me to follow in the same footsteps to ensure my conclusions would not find themselves in a vacuum. *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England 1066–1901* (2015) by John Niles inspired the introduction of VIGNETTE as a subsidiary sub-section, and its practical execution by Kurt Ågren in his doctoral thesis, *Adelns Bönder och Kronans* (1964).

In my postgraduate years at the University of Gothenburg, I had the privilege to learn from my senior doctoral colleagues how to best structure, organise, and execute good Ph.D. research. Furthermore, a great deal of valuable academic investigation has traditionally remained unavailable in form of defended but unpublished dissertation manuscripts. Fortunately, technological advancement and digitalisation has allowed me access to no less than twelve doctoral studies from various universities and countries during my research process.

Some positions presented in this research have already appeared elsewhere in print in the lead-up to this book. During the integration process, they underwent revisions, reviewing, and critical rethinking, while retaining core ideas and arguments. In particular, I approached the methodological and historiographical problems of *thegnly* studies in two articles[1] whose elements have been reworked in §§1.7, 2.2.1, 2.3.1, and 2.3.2.1 of this book. I then publicised some of my concrete empirical case studies of probable Old Norse meanings of the word "*thegn*" on English soil,[2] which I summarise in §5.3.1. The condensed §2.2.2.1 draws on my previous extended critique of Archbishop Wulfstan's informative but potentially misleading texts.[3] Latest before my *viva*, a collaboration with Timofey Guimon increased my command of the various software I later used in drafting my manuscript, gave me an opportunity to practise my skills as a diplomatician and informed my assessment of and work with the Anglo-Saxon charter corpus[4] in §3.2.1.1. Crucially, however, these pieces were carried out in revision mode and aimed to help me formulate the research questions that I pose in this study. Below, I provide for the first time comprehensive and overarching answers to them that bind individual contributions together in a novel way.

Though my study concerns social matters, it proved difficult to engage some gendered aspects of *thegnship*. To begin with, only men are called *thegns* in the extant sources. Old English indeed features a feminine counterpart to "*thegn*" (OE *þignen*), but it never saw a similar social use as did the masculine form. Nor could I find anywhere a single woman explicitly referred to as, perhaps, "X, the wife/daughter/etc. of Y the *thegn*". For sure, *thegns* were family people. They married, had children, claimed inheritance through women, relied on female agency in various social circumstances, and so on. Thus, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian women are given as much bibliographical space as possible whenever sources would mention them in connexion with *thegns*. However, as the impetus to rethink *thegns* was first of all semasiological and women neither attracted the appellation of *thegns*,

1 Sukhino-Khomenko 2018a–b.
2 Sukhino-Khomenko 2020b.
3 Sukhino-Khomenko 2021b.
4 Sukhino-Khomenko and Guimon 2022; Sukhino-Khomenko 2022.

nor identification through their *thegnly* male relatives, *thegnly* women greatly deserve a separate, onomasiological research.

Finally, to promote reader-friendliness, a word or two should be said about the structure and some lexical choices of the book. A socio-historical enquiry cannot do without terms to denote the people(s) it studies. Yet these adjectives and nouns may be fraught with anachronisms and potential misuse or even abuse, which warrants clarification. In this book, terms such as "English", "Anglo-Saxon", "Scandinavian", and "Nordic" will not connote any modern ethnic and/or geopolitical considerations (let alone racial). Below, "English" denotes the early medieval West Germanic-speaking people(s) of the island of Great Britain. Accordingly, "England" refers to its/their geographic location. "Scandinavian" likewise covers corresponding North Germanic speakers of the mainland peninsula of Scandinavia, the peninsula of Jutland (DAN. *Jylland*) and other islands in the present-day Danish archipelago, as well as a diaspora overseas originating in the aforementioned region.

Due to its broad scope, the study has accrued a great deal of relevant but somewhat accessory material. Since the book targets the widest possible audience, some may consider such supplements an impediment to the red thread of the research. Yet others may find them essential and indispensable to the whole argument. To best serve both parties, the study places such digressions in five shorter excursive and visually marked VIGNETTES. They provide additional context and elaborate on certain potentially subsidiary historical nuances, reflected in the VIGNETTES' titles and aimed at readers who may be unfamiliar with or more interested in the material. Those readers already acquainted with it may instead choose to skip the VIGNETTES or concentrate on those of the most appeal. In contrast to the VIGNETTES, the two EXCURSUSES interspersed between the CHAPTERS – and not visually distinct – address topics that are indispensable to a comprehensive study of *thegns*. These issues, recurrent in previous research, warrant attention but are somewhat sidestepped here to prioritise more pressing questions. Last but not least, much of the empirical material has been made accessible in the APPENDICES.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Primary Sources

Due to the method of maximising the range of texts to mention the object of study pursued in this book, primary sources for the historical research below are extremely numerous. All of them have been edited and printed over the past decades and sometimes even centuries, some on multiple occasions and some more often than others. The same applies to renditions in modern languages.[1] Choosing between them in itself, therefore, presented a certain challenge: while for some sources there exists a scholarly consensus on standard first-line versions,[2] others can lead to contentions.[3] Because this book does not belong to the *Quellenkunde* department, on balance, then, the most "reader-friendly" but still academic modern editions, wherever possible bilingual (original plus modern texts in parallel) and with normalised spellings, have been approached first, and specialised editions consulted second (unless the latter are the most up-to-date and readily available ones, such as the BACS series for many Anglo-Saxon charters and *SkP* for Old Norse skaldic poetry). Thus, for example, for the sake of accessibility, for many Old English texts the versions from the *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* and for Old Norse sources those from the *Íslenzk Fórnrit* series were preferred over critical or diplomatic editions, normally included and collated against in the apparatus of the books in the series just mentioned.

English translations of the sagas (given in parentheses with the first mention) were adopted from consulted editions; otherwise, my own translations on the vmodel "The Saga of X" were provided. All Biblical texts were consulted from the 2007 edition by the German Bible Society. Wherever possible, sources will be referred to with respective common titles in the language of original composition. Otherwise, modern scholarly names apply. References to fragments in the most often quoted primary sources follow the numeration system (book, chapter, sub-chapter, paragraph, etc.) of cited editions. Wherever applicable, individual lines have been indicated and supersede page numbers. Unless further referencing conventions specified for individual sources in the list below, arabic numerals in references are to pages in the editions cited. Original spellings and other typographical preferences (accentuation, punctuation, etc.) in quotations have been preserved unaltered as they appear in printed editions (see also A Note on Spelling and Language Conventions, below). For translations, wherever possible, previously published modern English versions have been used. Unless indicated otherwise, all source translations are quoted directly from them; all other translations are my own. In the interests of textual manageability, the following sigla have been used (for full bibliographical information on the cited editions, see References):

1 An illustrative, but by no means solitary, example can be found in *Beowulf*: on its poetic adaptations in modern English, see Magennis 2011.

2 E.g., upon seeing light, the presently most authoritative edition of the Anglo-Saxon legal corpus by Felix Liebermann (1903–1916]) immediately superseded all previous versions, including those by Reinhold Schmid (1832; rev. ed. 1858) and Benjamin Thorpe (1840). On Liebermann's *opus magnum*, see Rabin 2010.

3 See for example some critique by Hart 1997 of the currently standard edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, though not universally shared, as far as I am aware.

Old English:

ASC	edition: Dumville and Keynes 1986–present; quoted after MS and year; translation: Whitelock, Douglas, and Tucker 1961; quoted after MS and year
Bates, *RRAN*	edition: Bates 1998; quoted after document number (Arabic numeral)
Battle of Maldon	edition and translation: Atherton 2021
Beth	edition: Bethurum 1957; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral)
BH	edition and translation: Kelly 2003; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral)
BM, MS 32, and British Museum, MS Additional 32246	edition: Porter 2011
Cambridge Guild Regulation	edition: Thorpe 1865, pp. 610–613; translation: no. 136 in Whitelock 1979, pp. 603–605
Canons of Edgar	edition: Fowler 1972; translation: Rabin 2015b, pp. 85–100
CH I	edition: Clemoes 1997; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral); translation: Thorpe 1844–1846
CH II	edition: Godden 1979; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral); translation: Thorpe 1844–1846
Christ II; *Guthlac B*; *Juliana*; *Fates of the Apostles*; *Elene*	edition and translation: DOML XXIII, pp. 1–31; 33–75; 77–127; 130–137; 141–235
Confessional Prayers	edition: Hallander 1968
Davis, *RRAN*	edition: Davis 1913; quoted after document number (Arabic numeral)
De Temporibus Anni	edition and translation: Blake 2009
Durham Collectar	edition: Lindelöf 1927
Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies	edition: Bazire and Cross 1989; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral)
Enchiridion	edition and translation: Baker and Lapidge 1995
Épinal-Erfurt Glossary	edition: Pheifer 1974
Exodus; *Daniel*	edition: Krapp 1931, pp. 90–107; 110–132; translation: Shippey 2017, pp. 118–135; 138–158
First and Second Cleopatra Glossary	edition: Rusche 1996, pp. 160–410; 411–470, respectively
Five Old English Homilies	edition: Schaefer 1972; quoted after homily number
Genesis A	edition: Doane 1978; translation: Shippey 2017, pp. 37–43, 61–115
Genesis B	edition: Doane 1991; translation: Shippey 2017, pp. 43–61

Gesetze	edition: Liebermann 1903–1916 (cited after volume number [Roman numeral]); translation: Ine, Abt, Hl, Wi, Af, AGu, EGu, Ew, As, Blas: Attenborough 1922; Em, Eg, Atr, Cn, Wl art, Leis Wl: Robertson 1925; Geþyncðo, Grið, Mirce, Norðleod, Að, Northu, Rect: Rabin 2020; Wif: no. 50 in Whitelock 1979, pp. 467–468; ECf, text and translation: O'Brien 1999; Becwæð: Wormald 1999, pp. 384–385; all legal pieces quoted after conventions established in *Gesetze* I, p. xi
Grammatik und Glossar	edition: Zupitza 1880
Guthlac A; *Descent into Hell*; *Dream of the Rood*; *Andreas*; *Christ and Satan*	edition and translation: DOML XXVII, pp. 148–157; 160–173; 183–299; 301–351
Heptateuch	edition: Marsden 2008
Hexameron	edition and translation: Norman 1849
Hirtenbriefe	edition: Fehr 1914
Homilien und Heiligenleben	edition: Assmann 1889; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral)
Institutes of Polity	edition: Jost 1959; translation: DOML LXVI, pp. 38–99
JW	edition and translation: Darlington and McGurk 1995–1998; quoted after year
Leechdoms	edition and translation: Cockayne 1864
Letter of Alexander; *Beowulf*; *Judith*	edition and translation: DOML III, pp. 33–83; 86–295; 297–323
Letter to Sigeweard	edition and translation: Swain 2020
LG	edition: Skeat 1871–1887; quoted after Biblical conventions (Latin Vulgate)
LS I–III	edition and translation: DOML LVIII–LX; quoted after volume number (Roman numeral) and *vita*
MS Bodley 343	edition: Irvine 1993; quoted after homily (Arabic numeral)
MS Vesp. D. XIV	edition: Warner 1917
Nap	edition: Napier 1883; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral); partial translation: Rabin 2015b, pp. 127–170
OEB (verse)	edition and translation: DOML XIX
OEGD	edition: Hecht 1900
OEHE	edition and translation: Miller 1890–1898
OEMC	edition and translation: Karasawa 2015
OEOr	edition and translation: DOML XLIV
OEPC	edition: Sweet 1871; partial translation: Keynes and Lapidge 1983, pp. 124–130
OESol	edition: Carnicelli 1969; partial translation: Keynes and Lapidge 1983, pp. 138–152

Old English Glosses MS. Brussels	edition: Goossens 1974
Old English *Martyrologium*	edition and translation: Rauer 2013
Paris Psalter	edition and translation: DOML XLII
Phoenix; *Instructions for Christians*; *Seasons for Fasting*	edition and translation: DOML XV, pp. 18–63; 138–155; 156–173
Prayers (1941) and (1963)	edition: Holthausen 1941; Campbell 1963
RG	edition: Tamoto 2013; quoted after Biblical conventions (Latin Vulgate)
Riddles	edition and translation: DOML LXIX
Rob	edition and translation: Robertson 1956; quoted after document number (Arabic numeral)
S	Anglo-Saxon charters, catalogue numbers (Arabic numeral) after: Sawyer 1968; on the first appearance a date of the document given in parenthesis; in series of more than two documents, the "S" is given only before the first item in the row
SEHD	edition and translation: Harmer 1914; quoted after document number (Arabic numeral)
Sermo Lupi	edition: Bethurum 1957, pp. 261–275; translation: no. 240 in Whitelock 1979, pp. 928–934
SH I–II	edition: Pope 1967–1968; quoted after volume and homily number (Arabic numeral)
St Guthlac; *St Margaret*; *St Nicholas*; *Seven Sleepers*	edition and translation: DOML LXIII, pp. 141–217; 317–377; 486–533; 587–651;
Vainglory; *Gifts of Men*; *Order of the World*; *Rune Poem*; *Solomon and Saturn*; *Metrical Charms*	edition and translation: DOML XXXII, pp. 36–43; 56–63; 82–89; 126–133; 134–173; 186–277
Vespasian Psalter	edition: Kuhn 1965
VH	edition: Scragg 1992; quoted after homily number (Arabic numeral); translation: Nicholson 1991
Wills	edition and translation: Whitelock 1930; quoted after document number (Arabic numeral)
Writs	edition and translation: Harmer 1989; quoted after document number (Arabic numeral)
WSG	edition: Liuzza 1994–2000; texts quoted from vol. 1 after Biblical conventions (Latin Vulgate)

Old Norse:

Adonias Saga	edition and translation: Loth 1963
Ágrip	edition: ÍF XXIX, pp. 3–54; translation: Driscoll 2008

Ála Saga	edition and translation: Hui, Ellis, McIntosh et al. 2018
Annales Regii; *Lögmanns-Annáll*; *Flatø-Annaler*; *Gottskalks Annaler*; *Henrik Høyors Annaler*	edition: Storm 1888
Áns Saga	edition: Jónsson 1950, II, 365–493; translation: Waggoner 2012, pp. 160–185
Árna Saga; *Lárentíus Saga*	edition: ÍF XVII, pp. 3–212; 215–441; Norwegian translation: Stefánsson and Stefánsson 2007; Haflidason 1890
Arons Saga; *Hrafns Saga*; *Svínfellinga Saga*; *ÞorSgSk*	edition: ÍF XXIII, pp. 369–420; 299–367; 512–557; 393–512; translation: Porter 1975; Tjomsland 1951; McGrew 1974, II; respectively
BæjrL; *NGulL*	edition: *NGL* II, pp. 179–290; 306–326; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"
BarJosSg	edition: Rindal 1981
BjarL; *FrostL*; *JS*	edition: *NGL* I, pp. 301–336; 119–259; 259–300; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)" Norwegian translation: Hagland and Sandnes 1997; Larson 1935, pp. 213–405; respectively (*JS* untranslated)
BorgL; *EidL*	edition: Halvorsen and Rindal 2008; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Collinson, Landro, and Nilsson 2021
Christna Biscupär i Swerike; *ÄVgL*	edition: Wiktorsson 2011, II; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Lindkvist 2021, pp. 198–201; 22–71
DalL; *VmL*	edition: *SSGI* V; Swedish translation: Holmbäck and Wessén 1936, II
Dialógar; *MarSgBisk II*	edition: Unger 1877, I, pp. 179–255; 575–607
Duggals Leizla	edition and translation: Cahill 1983
Egils Saga	edition: Einarsson 2003; translation: *CSI* I, pp. 33–178
EGulL	edition: Eithun, Rindal, and Ulset 1994; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Simensen and Jørgensen 2021
Erex Saga	edition and translation: Blaisdell 1965
Fagrskinna	edition: ÍF XXVIV, pp. 57–364; translation: Finlay 2004
Fljótsdæla Saga; *Gunnars Þáttr*; *Vápnfirðinga Saga*; *Þorsteins Saga Hvíta*	edition: ÍF XI, pp. 215–296; translation: *CSI* IV, 379–433; 433–441; 313–344; 303–311
Fóstbræðra Saga; *Gísla Saga*; *Hrafns Þáttr*	edition: ÍF VI, pp. 121–276; 1–118; 317–333 translation: *CSI* II, pp. 329–402; 1–48; *CSI* III, pp. 446–454

Færeyinga Saga; *ÓlTrOdMunk*	edition: ÍF xxv, pp. 1–121; 122–362; translation: Faulkes 2016; Andersson 2003
Gísls Þáttr	edition: ÍF xv, pp. 319–335; translation: McCormack 2021, pp. 83–90
Gizurársáttmáli	edition: no. VII:12 in *NGL* i, pp. 460–462
Grettis Saga	edition: ÍF vii; translation: *CSI* ii, pp. 49–192
GrgKon	edition: Finsen 1852; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Bessason and Glendinning 1980
GrgStað	edition: Finsen 1879; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Wolf 2000
HáGóHkr; *HaGrHkr*; *HaHáFgHkr*; *HálSvHkr*; *ÓlTrHkr*; *YngHkr*	edition: ÍF xxvi, pp. 151–197; 198–224; 94–149; 84–93; 225–372; 9–83; translation: Finlay and Faulkes 2011, i, pp. 88–119; 120–136; 54–87; 48–54; 137–233; 6–47
HákHerHkr; *HaSigHkr*; *MaBlHaGilHkr*; *MaBærHkr*; *MaErlHkr*; *MaGóHkr*; *MaSonHkr*; *ÓlKrHkr*	edition: ÍF xxviii, pp. 347–372; 68–202; 278–302; 210–237; 373–417; 3–67; 238–277; 203–209; translation: Finlay and Faulkes 2015, iii, pp. 215–232; 41–122; 170–185; 127–144; 233–261; 3–40; 145–169; 123–126
HákHák	edition: ÍF xxxi–xxxii; translation: Dasnet 1894
Heiðarviga Saga; *Hænsa-Þóris Saga*	edition: ÍF iii, pp. 215–326; 3–47; translation: *CSI* iv, pp. 67–130; *CSI* v, pp. 239–260
Heimslýsing ok Helgifræði	edtition: Jónsson and Jónsson 1892–1896, pp. 150–177
Helgakviða Hundingsbana I; *Grípisspá*; *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*; *Oddrúnargrátr*	edition: Kristjánsson and Ólason 2014, ii, pp. 247–258; 286–295; 324–328; 365–371; translation: Crawford 2015, pp. 189–202; 220–233; 260–265; 319–326
Hervarar Saga	edition and translation: Tolkien 1960
HFN	edition: Noreen 1927 translation: Williams and Ralph 2018, i, pp. 146–359
HIL	edition: Noreen 1930 translation: Williams and Ralph 2018, ii
Hirðskrá	edition and Norwegian translation: Imsen 2000a; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; partial English translation: Berge 1968
Hulda-Hrokkinskinna	edition: Louis-Jensen (forthcoming)
Hyndluljóð; *Rígsþula*	edition: Kristjánsson and Ólason 2014, i, pp. 460–469; 449–457 translation: Crawford 2015, pp. 156–167; 145–155

HälL	edition: *SSGI* v; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; Swedish translation: Holmbäck and Wessén 1940, iii
Íslendingabók; *Landnámabók*	edition: ÍF i, pp. 3–30; 31–397; translation: Grønlie 2006; Edwards and Pálsson 2006; respectively
Íslendinga Saga	edition: ÍF xxi, pp. 3–272; translation: McGrew 1970, i
JB	edition and translation: Schulman 2010; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"
Jómsvíkinga Saga	edition: ÍF xxxiii; translation: Finlay and Jóhannesdóttir 2018
JysL	edition: *DGL* ii; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Tamm and Vogt 2016, pp. 242–293
KA	edition: Klemming 1862
Knýtlinga Saga	edition: ÍF xxxv, pp. 93–321; translation: Edwards and Pálsson 1986
Kristnitakan	edition: ÍF xvi, pp. 161–172
law amendments	edition: nos. VII, VI, I in *NGL* i–iii; respectively
Ljósvetninga Saga	edition: ÍF x; translation: *CSI* iv, pp. 193–256
LL	edition: Rindal and Spørck 2019; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Friðriksdóttir 2024
Morkinskinna	edition: ÍF xxiii–xxiv; translation: Andersson and Gade 2000
NikSgErkb II; *Silvesters Saga*	Unger 1877, ii, pp. 49–158; 245–287
Njála	edition: ÍF xii; translation: *CSI* iii, pp. 1–220
Orkneyinga Saga	edition: ÍF xxxiv; translation: Edwards and Pálsson 1978
ÓlHlHkr	edition: ÍF xxvii, pp. 3–415; translation: Finlay and Faulkes 2014, ii, pp. 3–278
ÓlHlLeg	edition: Jónsson 1957, i, pp. 203–400; German translation: Heinrichs and others 1982
ÓlHlSer	edition: Johnsen and Helgason 1941; also fragmentarily but in normalised spelling in ÍF xxvii, pp. 419–451; translation: Finlay and Faulkes 2014, ii, pp. 279–311
ÓlTrMest	edition: Halldórsson 1958–2000; translation: Sephton 1895
PálSgPost I; *PétSgPost I* and *II*	edition: Unger 1874, pp. 216–236; 1–201
Partalópa Saga	edition and translation: Andersen 1983

SgÞorBiskEl and *SgÞorBiskÝn*	edition: ÍF XVI; translation: Jakobsson and Clark 2013
Skaldskaparmál	edition: Faulkes 1998, I; translation: Faulkes 1987
SkL	*DGL* I; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Tamm and Vogt 2016, pp. 56–96
Skuggsjá	edition: Holm-Olsen 1983; translation: Larson 1917
Stjórn	edition: Astås 2009
Stjörnu-Odda Draumr	edition: ÍF XIII, pp. 459–525; translation: *CSI* II, pp. 448–459
Sverris Saga	edition: ÍF XXX; translation: Sephton 1899
Vatnsdæla Saga	edition: ÍF VIII, pp. 1–131; translation: *CSI* IV, pp. 1–66
ÝVgL	edition: *SSGI* I, pp. 77–222; sections quoted after conventions in this edition; individual paragraphs quoted as "§(§)"; translation: Lindkvist 2021, pp. 72–152
Eyv Lv; Glúmr *Gráf*; Eskál *Vell*; ÓTr Lv; Hfr *ErfÓl*; Ólhelg Lv; Sigv *Vestv*; Sigv *Erl*; Sigv *ErfÓl*; Sigv Lv; Sigv *Nesv*; Ótt *Hfl*; Bersi Lv; Brúlf Lv; Gizsv Lv; Bjbp *Jóms*	*SkP* I, pp. 213–235; 245–265; 280–329; 384–385; 400–441; 517–532; 556–578; 615–627; 628; 663–697; 698–737; 738–767; 795–797; 800–801; 817–819; 954–1000
Sigv *Berv*; Hharð Lv; ÞjóðA *Sex*; Arn *Hryn*; Halli XI *Fl*; Steinn *Óldr*; Mark *Eirdr*; Slembir Lv; Ív *Sig*; Sturl *Hryn*; Ólhv *Hryn*; Stur Hrafn; Sturl *Hákfl*; Anon *Nkt*;	*SkP* II, pp. 11–31; 42–56; 108–146; 181–205; 337–343; 367–381; 432–466; 499–500; 501–527; 658–669; 676–698; 727–744; 745–755; 761–806
Glúmr *Eir*; Refr *Giz*; ÚlfrU *Húsdr*; Þjóð *Haustl*; Þfagr *Frag*; Þul *Þorgþ I*; Þul *Manna*; SnSt *Ht*	*SkP* III, pp. 194; 254–258; 402–424; 431–463; 482–483; 669–674; 1094–1212
Hallm *Hallkv*; Egill Lv; Egill *Berdr*; Hfr Lv; TorfiV Lv; Ólbjarn Lv	*SkP* V, pp. 31–55; 169–187; 380–383; 872–914; 919–921, 950–951
Esk Geisl; Anon *Leið*; Anon *Pl*; Anon *Lókn*; Anon *Hsv*; Anon *Mdr*; Anon *Mv III*; *Anon Gyð*; Anon *Vitn*; Anon *Mgr*; Anon *Pét*; Anon *Heil*	*SkP* VII, pp. 5–56; 137–178; 179–220; 228–286; 358–449; 476–514; 515–526; 718–738; 739–757; 758–795; 796–844; 872–890

GunnLeif *Merl I*; Friðþ Lv; Hróksv *Hrkv*; Gestumbl *Heiðr*; Ormarr Lv; Hundk Lv; Anon (Ragn); Anon *Krm*; ǪrvOdd *Ævdr*	*SkP* VIII, pp. 38–133; 195–217; 344–366; 406–452; 474–476; 521–524 and 526–533; 657–659 and 687–706; 707–777; 885–947

Other Miscellaneous Sources:

BHL	Society of Bollandists 1899–1901; Fros 1986; quoted after *Vita* number
HE	edition and translation: Colgrave and Mynors 1969
SMOO I–II	Arnold 1882–1885
Hêliand; *Vatican Genesis*	edition: Behaghel 1996, pp. 7–216; 241–256 translation: Murphy 1992; Doane 1991, pp. 232–252; respectively
DB I and II; *Exon DB*	edition and translation: Morris 1973–1986; "Great" Domesday abbreviated as *DB* I, "Little" Domesday abbreviated as *DB* II, both cited according to foliation in Paul Vinogradoff's system followed by Phillimore conventions in parentheses; Exeter Domesday abbreviated as *Exon DB*, cited according to the conventions established in *Exon: The Domesday Survey of South-West England Online Project*; for reader-friendliness, all original abbreviated words are expanded to their corresponding full grammatical forms
Dialogi	edition and (French) translation: de Vogüé 1979–1980
GRA	edition and translation: Mynors 1998, I
LE	edition: Blake 1962; translation: Fairweather 2005
LHP	edition and translation: Downer 1972
Orosius	Arnaud-Lindet 1990–1991
VÆR	edition: Stevenson 1904, pp. 1–96; translation: Keynes and Lapidge 1983, pp. 67–110

Languages:

(O)DAN.	(Old) Danish	NORW.	Norwegian (bokmål)
FR.	French	OE	Old English
GER.	German	OHG	Old High German
GR.	Greek	ON	Old Norse
IC.	Icelandic	OS	Old Saxon
LAT.	Latin	ORUS.	Old Russian
MHG	Middle High German	PGMC	Proto-Germanic
MIDE	Middle English	PIE	Proto-Indo-European
MODE	Modern English	(O)SW.	(Old) Swedish

Frequent Textual Abbreviations and Symbols:

*	unattested reconstructed forms or collocations	gen.	genitive
<	derived from	l(l).	line(s)
>	gave rise to	lit.	literally
acc.	accusative	n(n).	footnote(s)
d./r.	died/reigned in	no(s).	number(s)
dat.	dative	p(p).	page(s)
c./ca.	*circa* ("about")	plur.	plural
chap(s)	chapter(s)	*s.a(a).*	*sub anno/-is* ("under the year[s]")
esp.	especially	*s.v(v).*	*sub verbo/-is* ("under the word[s]")
AD	*anno Domini* (datings of individual years in the Common Era chronology until the year 1500, especially to avoid confusion with Sawyer's numbers; omitted in dates of lives/offices/reigns)	sing.	singular

Manuscripts Sigla and Abbreviations:

4°	quarto (size of manuscript page, between 18 and 28 cm high)	GKS	*Den Gamle Kongelige Samling* (Reykjavík or Stockholm)
AM	Arnamagnæan manuscript collection (Reykjavík or Copenhagen)	Lund, UB Mh	University Library of Lund University, medieval manuscript (SW. *medeltidshandskrift*)
BL	British Library (London)	MS(S)	manuscript(s)
BM	British Museum (London)	NB	Nasjonalbiblioteket (Oslo)
CCCC	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College	Stockh.	Kungliga biblioteket (Stockholm)
fol(s).	folio(s)		

A NOTE ON SPELLING AND LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

Throughout the text, I have used spellings established by the 12th edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English* (2011), with an arbitrary preference for older forms. Inverted commas (‘ ’) indicate a verbatim quote from a source or modern literature and double quotation marks (“ ”) rhetorical devices or quotations within a quotation. The presence or absence of the emphasis (*italics type style*) in the originals has not been altered. My own use thereof indicates either an additional sense load, term, or an original lexeme from the sources. S p a c e d i n t e r v a l s emphasise where attention in the quoted text is particularly aimed at. Underscore type style marks alliterations. Block quotations mark longer excerpts from the consulted literature. Unless inserting a direct passage from a printed edition, for convenience’s sake, I used the standard 26-character Latin alphabet for ancient languages. However, within my own text, the following orthographical conventions had to be made allowance for. For *Old English*:

- þ/ð = dental non-sibilant fricative, voiceless and voiced respectively;
- æ = near-open front unrounded vowel;
- long vowels are marked with macrons (¯);
- ȝ, ſ, and ƿ have been consistently replaced with g, s, and w, respectively;
- no distinction between velar and palatal /k/ and /g/ (commonly spelt ċ and ġ, respectively) has been observed.

For *Old Norse*, the chiefly phonemic, “classic” standardised normalisation (IC. *samræmd stafsetning forn*) established by the editors of the *Íslenzk Fornrit* series has been preferred:

- þ/ð = dental non-sibilant fricative, voiceless and voiced respectively;
- æ/ę = near-open front unrounded vowel, long and short respectively;
- ǫ = open-mid back rounded vowel;
- œ/ø = close-mid front rounded vowel, long and short respectively;
- other long vowels are marked with the acute accent (´).

In direct quotes in parentheses, signalled by the lack of a capitalised abbreviation of the language, spellings as they occur in printed editions have been retained throughout.

Anglicised spellings have been preferred for Anglo-Saxon onomasticon, by- and nicknames adopted as used in modern scholarship; normalised Old (West) Norse non-hypocoristic variants took precedence for Scandinavian names, by- and nicknames capitalised and left untranslated. Scandinavian names appearing in Anglo-Saxon context were rendered in Old (West) Norse, with the exception of names of royalty. These principles did not apply to direct quotations from printed editions whose spellings remained unaltered. All translations from both ancient and modern languages, indicated by double quotation marks or in block quotations, are my own, unless specified otherwise.

Texts in other languages appear as they are printed in original editions consulted.

"Multos libros legi, multa magica praestigia vidi.
Arcanum tuum ne coneris a me occulere!"

Rex et Scurra, *Pupa Incantatoris Malefici* (vers. II:5–8)

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 The Problem: *Thegns* in Runic Inscriptions

It is a truism that extant literary sources are often lacunose when it comes to historical social research of early medieval Scandinavia.[1] External records only tangentially touch on the matter and concern first and foremost piratical activities. Later native Nordic texts, in both the vernacular and Latin, can be put in methodological doubt due to the gap in time that separates them from their narrative period. Fortunately, archaeological finds continuously offer new raw data. These, however, are for the most part mute by themselves and require further processing within theoretical frameworks from neighbouring disciplines.[2] Against this background, rune stones, i.e. memorials decorated with vernacular runic script, can frequently serve a potential, even if partial, solution. With a maximum of some three thousand presently known, they are unevenly spread over mainland Scandinavia dating from the Viking Age, and two out of every three extant stones bear commemorative inscriptions.[3] The impossibility of transcribed mistakes or alterations in transmission lessens the potential bias or distortions arising from the copying process. Rune stones supply bits of important information, such as names, familial relations, motivation to commemorate, landscape contexts, hints about religious and social praxes, as well as on maritime activities and the like, all of which has been duly appreciated in scholarship.[4]

In the course of the past century, 45 such inscriptions (Map 1) have been particularly used to shed some light on Viking-Age Scandinavian society. Scattered across eight provinces in present-day Denmark and Sweden, they all attest to certain *thegns*[5] (ON/OE *þegn*) in the decades on the either side of the year 1000 AD[6]. As is common for many runic inscrip-

1 E.g., Lund and Hørby 1980, pp. 15–32.

2 For an example from anthropology, see Helle 2009 and 2011 (the last title is a response to an earlier paper by Magerøy 1978). See a response by Orning 2010.

3 The Runor database provided the number at 3,164 at the query (sent in on 23 March 2024) limited to "Denmark", "Sweden", "Norway" in the "provenance" attribute, "790–1060" in the "dating" attribute, and "stone" in the "material" attribute. The Rundata database returned the number 2,964 at the query (retrieved on 10 June 2024) limited to "Denmark", "Norway", "Sweden" in the "country or Swedish province" attribute", "V" (i.e. Viking Age) in the "dating attribute", "stone" in the "material type" attribute, and "no" in the "is pure ornamental?" attribute. Introducing "no" in the "Is lost?" attribute decreases the number to 2,467 items. Conditioning the search by further setting a "yes" in the "Has personal name?" value returns 2,045 individual items.

4 Koefed 1963; Page 1992; Sawyer and 2001; Williams 2008; Jesch 2011; Källström 2020, to name but a few academic works in this field.

5 Also spelt "thane" in modern English.

6 For the revisited chronology, see Imer 2014 and Gräslund 2014. The long and short of it is that, according to Imer, the north Jutlandic and Skånian groups of fourteen stones were probably being raised sometime soon after conversion in the 970s and onwards because most of them blend conservative and innovative traits (such as AUD1995;279, DR 121, DR 123, which feature the older *þąnsi* [lit. this one, acc. sing.] next to the younger *æftiʀ* [lit. after, i.e. in memory of], and DR 106, which for the corresponding forms preserves the older *aft* side-by-side the younger *þani*); the four rune stones from Småland, Lolland, and Bornholm, by the same token, should belong to the upper chronological span in this group (*c.* 1025 AD), that would be contemporaneous with the Västergötlandic cluster: fourteen unornamented stones, provisionally dated to 980–1015 AD, and four ornamented in the proposed by Gräslund 'bird's-eye-view' style and/or

Map 1. *Thegns* in rune-stone inscriptions across modern Scandinavian provinces

tions, this alleged social status is surrounded by a paucity of context that offers scope for only rudimentary interpretation. The common formula would read a laconic "X raised a stone in memory of Y, X's father/husband/other relation, a (very) good/best/first among *thegn*". 73 further stones contain a very similar formula to commemorate certain *drengir*/*drengjar* (plur. of ON *drengr*), usually brothers (literal or figurative) or sons to the sponsors.[7]

In 1927, the Danish historian and archivist Svend Aakjær (1894–1963) published what proved to be a ground-breaking article. An abbreviated version of his main historical contention is that the Danish *thegns* (and *drengir*) were members of the royal retinue, the Scandinavian *hirð* as it became called at about the same time,[8] and were not dissimilar to landed nobility in England where OE *þegn* figured prominently at the same time.[9]

Aakjær's idea may not have been completely revolutionary novel. The Danish historian Erik Arup (1876–1951), possibly under some influence from Johannes Steenstrup's (1844–1935) lone remark (below, p. 63), wrote just a few years earlier, rather vaguely, that OE *þegn* was borrowed into Old Danish as a "honorific designation of a chieftain".[10] Aakjær never mentioned Arup's monograph in his own article but it is almost inconceiv-

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belonging to Pr 1, thus *c.* 1010–1050 AD. The Gunderup and Glavendrup stones demonstrate linguistic features categorised by Imer as older, but importantly, they mention a burial mound and a "Þórr bless" incantation, thus pushing them into the pre-conversion era. Against this Lund 2005, p. 52, argued that non-Christian features did not vanish overnight after Haraldr Blátǫnn's formal and personal baptism, as if by magic. So, Alli from Glavendrup could have been commemorated at any moment late in the 10th century just as much, though hardly much later the establishment of the bishopric of Odense on Funen (sometime by 988 AD), and likely before. And if one of the commemorated in the Gunderup inscription, Tófa, is the same person as the sponsor of DR 98 that spells *þani* and *æftiʀ*, then the Gunderup inscription ought to be younger still. To my mind, a weightier argument than Lund's is that Vg 150, otherwise congruent with other Västergötlandic stones (including those bearing Christian formulae), features the same non-Christian incantation, "Þórr bless"; and Vg 113, also linguistically younger and not in any other way different from the rest of the cluster, bears Þórr's hammer as its sole ornamentation. With all that in mind, all mentioned stones may be viewed as roughly contemporaneous and set within about one generation on either side of the year 1000 AD. The unornamented Västergötlandic monuments exhibit the same amalgam of older and newer forms as mentioned above, while the Jutlandic DR 98 and DR 213 – otherwise indistinguishable from the rest – spell only younger forms. In disciplines like art history and linguistics, innovations hold significant weight in determining the age of a piece or language, while archaic features provide little persuasive evidence for dating. The extra-Christian traits may serve probably more as signs of conservative or syncretic cultural features rather than unequivocal dating criteria.

7 See the two lists put together by Goetting 2006, pp. 382–383, and the reproduced inscriptions themselves in APPENDIX 3.4. Since this publication, a new find in two parts has been made in Venavalla (Västergötland), just south of the cluster of other *thegnly* inscriptions in this province: first in 2019 a bigger fragment bearing the runes **...þign + kuþan · kuþ : ialbi ·...** ("…*thegn* + [acc. sing.] good, God help..."), and then a smaller fragment reading **...ur +** (could be an acc. sing. ending of a relation term, e.g., of ON *fǫður*, or a name, e.g., of Ǫzurr) in 2021. The inscription has not yet received an official signum but beyond doubt belongs to the previously known Vg Fv1980;238, also from Venavalla. At the same time, the highly damaged Ög 200 should be taken off the list. Erik Brate (1857–1924) originally read **...[k]umla eptir geirma þegn [n]ýtan b[ónda]**(?) **...** in 1893 and shortly before 1911, when the lower half of the stone hiding in the turf had not been discovered yet. Arthur Nordén's (1891–1965) autopsy of the stone in summer of 1945 revealed this shortcoming, and while not itself flawless, reads **[þ]ka-** in place of Brate's **þ[k][n]** and leaves this sequence untranslated. From the photos Nordén supplied it may be remains of a personal name starting with a "Þór-" (though further work *in situ* is required). My sincerest thanks to Michael Lerche Nielsen and Magnus Källström for sharing the news about the Venavalla stone with me and confirming my doubts about Ög 200. Further, based on their formulae, the Jutlandic stones DR 129 and DR 150 may also have plausibly commemorated *thegns*, but both inscriptions are presently damaged in the relevant spots and will be excluded from the list below.

8 ON *hirð* made its recorded debut appearance in Sigv *Nesv* 6.

9 Aakjær 1927.

10 '...hædrende betegnelse for en høvding' (Arup 1925, p. 107).

able that he was unfamiliar with it. A year later Aakjær himself published a book review[11] in which he briefly teased his main theses that he was soon to elaborate on. That ON *þegn* had something to do with royal or chieftainly service, not least because of the Old English cognate's meaning, was a common trope in Swedish toponymic studies before and after.[12] But it was Aakjær's 1927 seminal paper that brought all the evidence together and put a new spin on the matter altogether.

Not everyone – especially philologists – sided with Aakjær's interpretation. As early as 1945, the Danish historian and runologist Karl Martin Nielsen (1907–1987) wrote a provocatively titled essay in direct opposition to Aakjær's views.[13] He amassed evidence of (later) written Old Norse sources that supported previous dictionary definitions in which *thegns* were the pillars of the pre-state, essentially democratic Viking-Age society, not at all shaped by royal power.

Ever since then, relevant Scandinavian scholarship seems to have been split into what may be labelled "Aakjærians" (or "camp vassalage") and "Nielsenists" (or "camp local leadership"). The former camp sees runic *thegns* aligned with the growing power of kings and the value of Aakjær's explanation in that it historically contextualised the Danish (and, by extension, Nordic overall) processes of early medieval state formation. The latter camp finds no association between kingship and these characters and, in sociological terms, characterises them as autonomous lords and magnates. It goes without saying that the resources and skilled artisan work it took to raise a rune stone *ipso facto* marked the social, economic, cultural, prestigious, and other prominence of the deceased and sponsors alike (*cf.* below, n. 14). Therefore, implications of the preferred interpretation are many, as they presuppose rather different power relations in society. If one joins the "Aakjærian" camp, then one would inevitably draw a top-down power structure in which rulers establish their control over territory by asserting their influence through dependent agents. Should one, on the other hand, take the side of "Nielsenists", a bottom-up hierarchy emerges, where the power resides with the wealthy local leaders and is accordingly reflected in the landscape.

In this conflict of opinions, itself the prerequisite of progress in academic research, both interpretations evidently possess explanatory merits absent from that of their opponents. The divide probably owes to conflicting theoretical premises at the bottom of each explanation. "Aakjærians", in the lack of direct evidence, frequently call(ed) upon "common sense".[14] Conversely, overarching judgements are cut off by Ockham's razor in the hands of "Nielsenists". They assume the interpretative primacy be vested in the first-hand sources lest it hinges on but secondary (albeit tempting) material that, once removed, renders the whole explanation untenable.[15] Risking oversimplification, it is not unreasonable to contend that, by roughly the year 2000, the discussion had by and large reached stalemate.

11 Aakjær 1926, p. 115.
12 E.g., Lindroth 1918, p. 59; 1945, p. 90; Lindqvist 1926, p. 377; Elgqvist 1947, p. 121.
13 Nielsen 1945.
14 E.g., Sawyer and Sawyer 2001, pp. 373–374.
15 Nielsen 1945, p. 113, it would seem, noted this weakness in his opponent back at the inception of the debate.

1.2 Previous Approaches to the Problem: The Anglo-Saxon "Reference Model"

Concurrence of the lexeme *þegn* in texts from two historically connected regions (England and Scandinavia) in two historically linked languages (Old Norse and Old English),[16] stressed by Aakjær, warrants a comparative approach, pioneered by the Danish historian himself. Consider, for example, the following entries from the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Old Norse *Fagrskinna* ("The Fine Parchment"):

> [*ASC*: 1013 AD] Then King Swein [= Sveinn Tjúguskegg] turned from there to Wallingford, and so west across the Thames to Bath, where he stayed with his army. Then Ealdorman Æthelmær came there, and with him the western thegns, and all submitted to Swein, and they gave him hostages. When he had fared thus, he then turned northward to his ships, and all the nation regarded him as full king. [my emphasis][17]

> [*Fagrskinna*: 1035 AD] King Magnús [Góði] took power as widely over all of Norway as his father had done, gained the land without battle and with the consent of all the *thegns*, both powerful and otherwise, and of all the common people, and they all preferred rather to be free than to suffer the oppression of the Danes any longer. [my emphasis][18]

It might appear at first sight astonishing that two independent texts, separated by two hundred years and written in England and Norway, would on a similar occasion – that is, submission to and acclamation of a new king (*cf.* ON *konungstekja*) in the first half of the 11th century – style the main actors by the same word. On the other hand, already for some later Old Norse history writers, England and other "Northern countries" (ON *Norðrlǫnd* = LAT. *gentes septentrionales*, lit. northern peoples?)[19] then conceptually belonged to one trans-regional chronotope.[20] It was underscored by Scandinavian viking activity here that lent a conventional name and span *c.* 789–1066 AD to of the much-debated Viking Age (in the West).[21] Aakjær, therefore, rightly emphasised the value of Old English texts which goes beyond the quoted passages. They too contain a plethora of references to *thegns* and, crucially, are often contemporaneous with the runic inscriptions in question, unlike most Old Norse texts. But by Aakjær's time, in British historical literature there already existed what may be compared to a "reference model"[22] of a stereotypical Anglo-Saxon

16 Three, if one adds various transliteral renderings in later Anglo-Norman Latin.

17 *Þa wende Swegen cyning þanon to Wealingaforda ⁊ swa ofer Temese westweard to Baðon ⁊ sæt þær mid his fyrde, ⁊ com Æþelmær ealdorman þyder ⁊ þa westernan þegenas mid him, ⁊ bugon ealle to Swegene ⁊ hi gisludon. Þa he ðus gefaren hæfde, wende þa norðweard to his scipum ⁊ eal þeodscype hine hæfde þa for fulne cyng* (*ASC*: 1013 AD [MSS C, D, E]).

18 *Magnús konungr lagði undir sik allan Nóreg svá vítt sem faðir hans hafði átt, fekk landit orrostulaust ok at vild allra þegna, bæði ríkra ok óríkra, ok alls múgsins, ok vildu þá vera allir heldr frjálsir en þola lengr yfirgang Dana* (*Fagrskinna*, chap 47, p. 210). I allowed myself to replace 'subjects' in Alison Finlay's original translation with "*thegns*" to retain the lexical parallel with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

19 Fjalldal 2005, pp. 27–29; Jakobsson 2011.

20 The use of the Bakhtinian term "chronotope" (< GR. χρόνος, lit. time, and τόπος, lit. place) here as a shorthand for "chronological markers and the triangulation of spatial landmarks" is foremost informed by Shchavelev 2020 (quotation from p. 507).

21 Interested readers can consult, e.g., Christiansen 2002, pp. 4–8; Brink 2008b; Palm 2010, pp. 16–23; Lind 2011, 2012, 2021; Barrett 2008, 2010; Ashby 2015; Baug, Skre, Heldal, and Jansen 2019; Lund and Sindbæk 2022, pp. 172–174.

22 For the sake of simplicity, I engage the following definition from computer science: '...an abstract framework for understanding significant relationships among the entities of some environment [...] based on a small number of unifying concepts and may be used as a basis for education and explaining standards to a non-specialist' (OASIS SOA Technical Committee 2020).

thegn (below, p. 39) that guided much of his own assessment. This model incidentally very often bypassed the Scandinavian *thegns* altogether. Apart from frequently resorting to secondary literature, Aakjær has been criticised for transgressing temporal boundaries and building part of his argument about the late Viking-Age social conditions on English 12th–13th-century material.[23] But these are not the only problems.

1.3 Archbishop Wulfstan: An Anglo-Saxon Ideologist and Social Theorist and his Long Shadow

The abundance of mentions can unexpectedly hinder elucidation of Anglo-Saxon *thegns*. Words make sense only in context, and as pointed out by Antonette diPaolo Healey and her colleagues, 'we are not the audience for whom these early medieval texts were written', nor did 'the Anglo-Saxons ha[ve] our kind of social conscience'.[24] The standard material of choice in the said reference model has since early days been the corpus of literary works of Archbishop Wulfstan (II) of York (d. 1023). In the second half of the 20th century, studies on him significantly extended our understanding of his purviews.[25]

Wulfstan is estimated to have been born between 946 and 966 AD. His geographic origins are unknown, both West Midlands and the South-Eastern "Danelaw" (including the Fenlands) have been proposed. In 996 AD, he assumed the London cathedra. Since then, he regularly appeared high up on witness lists in royal diplomas between the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Winchester. Then, in 1002 AD, Wulfstan was appointed bishop of Worcester and simultaneously archbishop of York. Joining the reins of these two sees had had precedent in two episcopal generations since 958 AD. His Worcester episcopate lasted till 1016 AD, from which date to his death he held solely the northern archbishopric. From 1008 AD, Wulfstan became the leading drafter of Anglo-Saxon royal legislation, and it was he who put together King Æthelred's (r. 978–1016) later laws (labelled V–X Atr by Felix Liebermann). Upon King Cnut's (r. 1016–1035) ascension to the throne, Wulfstan kept his high position of a trusted advisor and ideologist. His greatest achievement and pinnacle in this legislative walk of life was a two-part joint promulgation of ecclesiastic and secular legal compendia in Cnut's name, put together in 1021 or 1022 AD,[26] shortly before death on 28 May 1023 AD.[27]

Wulfstan was probably one of, if not the most sociologically-minded Old English writers. At times, he wrote as if for modern historians. The genres most favoured by the Archbishop and in which his interests received deepest reflection were his homilies, laws – between which he easily switched even within one text, – and treatises on episcopal governance. His unfinished *Institutes of Polity*, a tract on good social order, includes features of all three. Even before his talents were employed at court in official capacity, Wulfstan had produced two historical-legal fictions, the so-called *Laws of Edward the Elder and Guthrum* (1002×1004 AD)[28]

23 Syrett 1998, p. 46.
24 Healey 2006, p. 77.
25 Literature on Wulfstan is too great for one footnote. Beside individual studies cited in this section, among the sample of the latest general works are Wormald 1999, pp. 449–465; Townend 2004; Orchard 2007; Lionarons 2010; Rabin 2016. Wulfstan's broader influence has been explored by, e.g., Tveito 2007, and by the same author in his later publications.
26 Richards 2010.
27 Wulfstan's biography was consulted from Rabin 2015, pp. 9–16.
28 Schwartz 2018.

and the *Canons of Edgar*.[29] It is this sociological and legalistic outlook of his, coupled with didacticism, that probably ensured his position as an official legislator for the kings. One of Wulfstan's favourite ideas, his *sui generis* "grand theory" painstakingly reconstructed by scholars, was what the British legal historian Patrick Wormald (1947–2004) aptly called an "orderly" or "holy society", or

> [...] the sort of society [Wulfstan] was sure that the kingdom of the English had to be, if they were to keep the terms of the Covenant whereby (as Bede had shown) God allowed them to occupy their beautiful island, and if they were after all to avoid the fate of their backsliding British predecessors.

Wulfstan envisaged this ideal society as capable to 'face with confidence the unspeakable terrors of the Final Days'.[30] This fear was all the more apparent as the kingdom became the target of renewed viking attacks conceptualised by Wulfstan as divine punishment in his famous *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* ("The Sermon of the Wolf to the English").[31]

The Archbishop was well-acquainted with Anglo-Saxon history, from which he drew a lot of inspiration for his "orderly society". As with many a reformer, he presented his vision not as something new but, contrarily, as rooted in history-sanctified tradition.[32] The *Laws of Edward the Elder and Guthrum* serve a good illustration. Probably discontent with deviating ecclesiastical customs in the "Danelaw", Wulfstan invented a fictitious set of rules in the wake of the authentic treaty between King Alfred (r. 871–899) and the viking warlord Guthrum (d. 890?). King Cnut's laws were consciously modelled by Wulfstan on King Edgar's bipartite Andover law-code from sixty years prior,[33] with which he was familiar and even revisited when copying.[34] Early Anglo-Saxon past and the time of Anglo-Saxon Christianisation, too, served a beacon for Wulfstan: Andrew Rabin's study demonstrates Wulfstan's knowledge and active adaptation of the 7th-century Kentish legal corpus,[35] and manuscripts with early legislation were available to him in both Worcester and York.[36] Besides that, Wulfstan is credited with involvement in editing the entries in some redactions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 959–982 AD and even drafting the records of the events of 983–1022/1023 AD (the so-called "Æthelredian annals").[37]

In short, Wulfstan was a 'conservative church-man' for whom 'social mobility was a long-standing concern'.[38] Coincidently, it is his pen that wrote the texts which supply the cornerstones for modern de-/prescriptions of what or who counted as an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*. The existence of a whole authorial ideological programme of a "social regeneration"

29 Andrew Rabin dates the final redaction to *c.* 1017×1018 AD, Sara Pons-Sanz includes the earliest drafts and provides a broader period of 1002×1016 AD. The name is derived from a rubric in one of the manuscripts and not to be taken at face value.

30 Lionarons 2010, p. 7; Wormald's extensive quote at p. 3. More about Wulfstan's vision of a proper social order can be found in: Rabin 2015, pp. 43–44.

31 Cubitt 2018.

32 See a general problematisation by Kuskowski 2024 (esp. 158–162).

33 Marafioti 2019, pp. 21–50. On the Andover legislation, see below, §3.4 *passim*.

34 Wormald 1999, pp. 313–317.

35 V Atr 10, p. 240, repeats Wi 3, p. 12; VII Atr 2:4, p. 260, echoes Wi 14–15, p. 13; Grið 6–8, p. 470, adapts Abt 1–2, p. 3, and Wi 2, p. 12; II Cn 55, p. 348, recycles verbatim Wi 4, p. 12; see Rabin 2019.

36 Richards 2010, p. 148.

37 Stafford 2020, chap 9, – although *cf.* Metlitskaya 2022, who questions Wulfstan's authorship. Additionally, Wulfstan's pen may have drafted two vernacular poems integrated into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s.aa.* 959 and 975 AD (Pons-Sanz 2007b; Schwartz 2023, pp. 650–668).

38 Lavelle 2010, p. 63.

in the wake of witnessed by him troubled and "lawless" age begs the question of just how accurately Wulfstan's account reflects the social conditions of his epoch. A due appreciation of this ideological agenda is vital for any historical treatment of these texts of his and their value as a historical source for *thegns* as research object.

Granted, such reservations had not yet taken hold when Aakjær wrote his seminal paper. Nor was Wulfstan's authorship of the relevant passages even realised before 1950.[39] Yet, because of Wulfstan's readily available descriptive definitions (below, §2.2.2), at present, "Anglo-Saxon *thegn*" has become a somewhat ideal, self-sufficient concept and analytical construct that gets retrospectively projected back on and converges with the actual usage in the sources, thereby approaching a status of "common knowledge". More problematic still is the apparent lack of a synthesis, as historians have been tangentially addressing *thegns* as part of other studies: military history, "Germanist" (Tacitean) *comitatus*, legal status, land tenure, Domesday social patterns, etc. This fragmentation clearly stems from discrepancies in the sources themselves, and the above-mentioned developments in source scrutiny call for a like updated scrutiny of our concept of an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*.

1.4 Aim, Scope and Relevance of Research and its Questions

When the available evidence is pieced together, *thegns*' historical role (or, at this point, perhaps safer to say: the role given to them in historiography) is hard to deny or underestimate and it has been well-researched in previous scholarship (below, Chapter 2). Yet, when it comes to the Scandinavian historiographies, scholarly debate appears to be at an impasse. As they were originally formulated by Aakjær and Nielsen, the explanations of runic *thegns* by "camp vassalage" and "camp local leadership" appear mutually incompatible. A look west across the North Sea falls short of breaking this deadlock, too, as here Wulfstan's figure looms large by offering a seemingly available but possibly simplistic or even, with the advance of modern source criticism, incomplete answer that requires further elaboration (below, §2.2.2). On top of this, while Anglophone literature has since the very beginning figured prominently in the Nordic discussion on the runic *thegns*, the reverse has not been the case. Such absence of the Nordic component in discussing Anglo-Saxon *thegns* with which rune stones are to be compared adds to the situation a flavour of a vicious circle.

Breaking through the postulated stalemate requires a thorough re-examination and collation of the available source material – both Old English and Old Norse, the latter largely represented by Old Norwegian and Icelandic specimens due to the nature of the survived corpus (below, §4.2). This is exactly the ambition of the current research. *Thegns* will constitute its chief object of study. In this respect, though this chapter began with a concrete problem in runic studies, a project such as the one conceived here is unavoidably cross-disciplinary. It simultaneously belongs to Anglo-Saxon studies just as much as to "viking" studies, and vice versa. Among many potential research questions, this study has selected three which seem to have a particular bearing, to answer which is the aim of this research:

39 Bethurum 1950.

Question 1: What can OE/ON *þegn* say about the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian social structures?[40] What can OE/ON *þegn*'s diachronic lexicography say about Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian intellectual elites' changing social reflections on these matters?

Question 2: What can the answer to the above question tell us about power distribution and its organisation in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian socio-political orders in the "second Viking Age" and late Anglo-Saxon England? In the main, wherever possible the following principal but not sole social facets will be paid attention to:

- wealth and landed property/tenure;
- geographical spread;
- embeddedness in social networks and social behaviour;
- embeddedness in power structures;
- legal aspects.

Question 3: Finally, research since Svend Aakjær's study has pointed out the socio-political context in which runic *thegns* appear – namely in the period of active Anglo-Scandinavian contacts through the mediation of King Cnut's "empire". With this in mind, addressing the *thegnly* controversy can contribute to a more nuanced answer to the question, how well do we understand consequences of the said interaction?

Though such questions have one or another way been researched before at various stages (explored in Chapter 2), an attempt to combine and bring them together in one study about *thegns* on a new methodological level has not so far been executed. By uncovering who – and why – was called *thegn* in their contemporary social context at hand, and these *thegns* fared therein, this research aims at nuancing our understanding of social orders in the two regions under examination. Further, by examining the regions in tandem in the case of *thegns*, this book will seek to offer a qualitative contribution to the ongoing study of the interconnectedness of the North Sea region in the early Middle Ages. This doctoral thesis can also serve as a viability assessment of sorts of the previously unavailable corpus tools. If deemed viable successful by other researchers, such *instruments de travail* may, it is hoped, prove further useful for studying comparable problems.

1.5 Historical Frame of Reference and Context

This book on *thegns* abounds in historical names, dates, places, events, terms, often in an interlaced manner. To facilitate reading, as well as to adumbrate a canvas for the answers to the three research questions to fit onto, the section below will situate *thegns* in their wider historical context.

40 See the Soviet medievalist Aron Gurevich's (1924–2006) observation that, 'Every attempt to grasp the meaning of words which were in use in a distant epoch can deepen our understanding of the community which used them and of its customs' (quotation after Brink 2021, p. 122); and a similar opinion – 'Words mean in context, and it is through the study of words in their contexts that we can plot the nuances and changes of meaning that represent changes in both material culture, and in the ideology and social structures...' – of Jesch 2001, p. 8.

1.5.1 Key Political Dynamics

The studied timeframe, provisionally divisible at *c.* 980 AD between the "first Viking Age" of enterprise and *ad hoc* cooperation of multiple "sea kings" (ON *sækonungar*) and land grab, and the "second" (or "late") of more coordinated political efforts and conquest,[41] is often labelled one of "unification" in England and of (incipient) "state building/formation" (SW. *stats-/riksbildning*, NORW. *rikssamling*, DAN. *statsdannelse* and similar) in Scandinavia.[42] However, to avoid teleology, at least some recent scholarship leans towards "political consolidation" instead,[43] commonly driven by dynastic effort.

1.5.1.1 the "first Viking Age"

Early political consolidation in Southern Scandinavia was reversed with the infighting and likely extinction of the lineage of the first (high) king of the Danes *Guðfriðr/Guð(f)røðr (LAT. *Godefredus*, d. 810) of whom some continuous information exists. North of the peninsula of Jutland this decline probably freed the hands of another potentate, Haraldr inn Hárfagri (d. *c.* 932?), mentioned, though, in only two contemporaneous skaldic poems.[44] Scholars who accept his existence (even if not under this nickname during lifetime) relocate and limit his rule to only present-day Western Norway. Some curtail his line to just two succeeding generations and dismiss both subsequent Norwegian kings' claimed descent from him and his purported link to the quasi-legendary Ynglingar[45] (henceforth, the "Ynglingar–Hárfagri" as a purely analytical name of Viking-Age Norwegian high kings, irrespective of actual genetic relation; Figure 8), in modern-day Norway associated with the archaeological site of Skíringssalr–Kaupang. The Ynglingar are seen as a semi-fabled dynasty[46] originating in the territory of the Svíar people around the lake Mälaren – the second (after the Danish dominion) most populous mainland Scandinavian region. Between these three power hot spots stretched the land of the Gautar people. Political authority among the Gautar appears to have remained fragmented, despite later sources citing names of pre-800 AD local (petty?) kings and as many as eleven post-800 AD jarls.[47]

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41 Sawyer et al. 1969. Notwithstanding the ensuing critique and discussion, the idea has gained wide appreciation (e.g., Dumville 2008), though in Ireland other dates must be observed.

42 Academic items in these and related problemata are legion. In general matters, the ensuing overview in §§1.5.1–2 consulted the following works: (England) Campbell 2000, supplmented and in many respects superceded by Molyneaux 2015; (Norway) Dørum and Holberg 2017, esp. chaps 5–9; (Sweden) Line 2007, chaps 1–2, 6, supplemented by Sawyer 1988; (Denmark) Hybel 2018; as well as individual pieces in the collected volume: Brink and Price 2008, – by Claus Krag, Else Roesdahl, Clare Downham, Thomas Lindkvist and chaps 7–8 (a–e) in the edited volume: Helle 2003, – by Peter and Birgit Sawyer, Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, Claus Krag, Thomas Lindkvist.

43 E.g., Bolton 2009; Larrea 2023.

44 On them, see Fidjestøl 1993.

45 Haraldr's historicity has been problematised by, e.g., Sawyer 1976; Krag 1989, 1993, 1999, pp. 19–22; Jesch 1996; Jakobsson 2002a–b, 2016; Ghosh 2011, pp. 66–70; Matsumoto 2011; Long 2017, pp. 101–111.

46 *Ynglingatal*'s ("The List of the Ynglingar") composition around 900 AD rather than the 12th century, is supported by multiple scholars (see references by Skre 2020, p. 198 [n. 2]), though it does not confirm the historicity of the named persons, whose genealogical line-up could have also been a later invention (see Johansson 2010, p. 140). Four Ynglingar names from the *Hervarar Saga* (chap 11) also appear in *Vita Anskarii* ("The Life of St Ansgar", *c.* 869–876 AD) as mid-9th-century Svía kings associated with Birka [SW. *Björkö*] in the lake Mälaren, but any correspondence stops at the onomastic level.

47 Gräslund 1983 and the list of pre-1100 AD jarls at p. 48 (n. 1). Starting in the late 1980s, Thomas Lindkvist has penned multiple contributions to early Götlandic history. For an archaeological perspective can be consulted Löfving 2001; Theliander 2005 (esp. pp. 21–28); Rundkvist 2011.

Re-configurations in Scandinavia probably fuelled and in turn were themselves catalysed by outflow of energetic population overseas in addition to simultaneous inner colonisation at home. The now believed non-negligible injection of Scandinavian demographics caused a domino effect in lowland Britain in 865–878 AD, when a situational militarised coalition, the so-called "great heathen army" (OE *micel hæþen here*), overran the East and North before its division led by Guthrum was halted by the West Saxon King Alfred in Wiltshire. These territories and the emergent mixed society(-ies) inhabiting them commonly pass as the "Danelaw" (OE *Dena lagu*), a potential 11th-century misnomer in its presupposition of ethnic homogeneity and defined temporal and geographic boundaries, neither of which are supported by evidence.[48] For the lack of a better lexical alternative, however, "Danelaw" will below be used to describe, in Ben Raffield's words, 'a moniker for Scandinavian political and cultural influence at a regional level'[49] in the geographical 'part which was under Danish rule'[50] by the time of King Alfred's death. His reign inaugurates the "late(r) Anglo-Saxon period".[51] Its second half, it is marked by transformation of administrative, fiscal, and legal structures initiated by his dynasty (henceforth, the "Cerdicings" after the claimed progenitor, Cerdic [d. 534?]) after other native potentates' knock-out by the vikings or forced acceptance of juniority in the former half. By 954 AD, King Edward the Elder (r. 899–924) with his sister Æthelflæd (r. 911–918, titled "Lady of the Mercians" after her marriage to Ealdorman Æthelred [d. 911] of Western Mercia), and Kings Æthelstan (r. 924–939), Edmund (r. 939–946), and Eadred (r. 946–955) expanded the West Saxon domination over the disunified mosaic of the "Danelaw". The newly-consolidated polity briefly cracked along the Thames between Edmund's sons Kings Eadwig (r. 955–959) and Edgar (r. 957/959–975), but was restored upon the former's sudden death in 959 AD.

The same years mark the death of Gormr inn Gamli. He was a, possibly second-generation, mid-Jutlandic ruler who, with and maybe thanks to his wife Þýr(v)í, had probably risen above other vaguely-known peninsular competitors of the 930s and was named on rune stones DR 41–42 in Jelling (henceforth, the "Jelling dynasty" as the name of this lineage).[52] The couple reigned synchronously with King Hákon inn Góði (r. *c.* 934–961?) in the north, Haraldr inn Hárfagri's offspring reared at Æthelstan's court and a failed Norwegian missionary. Hákon was violently succeeded by sons of his elder half-brother Eiríkr Blóðøx, who had been ousted abroad and is usually identified as York's last Scandinavian king.[53] Headed by the elder of the brothers and initially helped to power by Þýr(v)í and Gormr's son King Haraldr Blátǫnn (r. *c.* 958 – *c.* 986), they proved too delinquent as junior rulers under Haraldr. Subsequently, he replaced the Eiríkssynir by Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson (r. 970–995) from the Ynglingar–Hárfagri's erstwhile allies seated in Hlaðir (present-day

48 Some challenged its heuristic value, e.g., Prien 2013.

49 Raffield 2020, p. 211. Further problematisation, with extensive summaries of preceding archaeological, toponymical, and linguistic research, of the "Danelaw" as term and concept can be found in other archaeological contributions by the same author, as well as in a historical piece by Stattel 2019 (esp. pp. 163–167).

50 *…þam dæle þe under Dena anwealde wæs* (*ASC*: 900 [MSS A, B]/901 AD [MS C]; *recte* 899; quotation after MS C).

51 This periodisation found use in (but not only) recent works of, e.g., Lavelle 2007, pp. 46–47; Roach 2013, pp. 467; Molyneaux 2015; Lambert 2017, pp. 163–348; Blanchard 2023, p. 176.

52 Sawyer and Sawyer 2003a; Sawyer 2000, pp. 158–166; 2005, – see, however, dissenting opinions and other interpretations regarding Þýr(v)í by Nielsen 2005, Stille 2005, and Stoklund 2005. On the Jelling stones, see further Stoklund 1991; 2006.

53 The historicity of Hákon's upbringing in England has been scrutinised by Williams 2001. Fjalldal 2005, pp. 35–36, however, discards the reported details and circumstances surrounding Hákon's arrival from England to Norway and those about Eiríkr's English career.

Lade, a suburb of Trondheim). Back in Jelling, Haraldr Blátǫnn boasted to have 'won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian',[54] although according to the (partisan) German sources, there had already existed young dioceses in Ribe, Århus, and Schleswig (just north of the later abandoned Hedeby at the neck of Jutland). His consolidative achievement, however, was later upset by a military defeat from the German emperor, Jarl Hákon's consequential renouncement of allegiance, and Haraldr's ultimate expulsion following a confrontation with his own son, Sveinn Tjúguskegg (r. *c.* 986–1014).

1.5.1.2 the "second Viking Age"

In the early 990s, during an unverifiable meddling into the Danish affairs (occupation?) by the first historically documented king of the Svíar with some continuous lineage, Eiríkr inn Sigrsæli (d. *c.* 995; Figure 8), Sveinn Tjúguskegg raided England with the then Ynglingar–Hárfagri "sea king" Óláfr Tryggvason (r. 995–1000). The duo was bought off by King Edgar's son King Æthelred "the Unready" and thrown out of tune by the king's separate pact with Óláfr,[55] who then seized power over the Norwegians from Jarl Hákon and began militant Christianisation. Óláfr Tryggvason soon fell in a maritime ambush by Hákon's son, joined by Sveinn and his stepson and the biological son of Eiríkr inn Sigrsæli, Óláfr Skautkonungr (r. *c.* 995–1022). For the next fifteen years Óláfr Tryggvason's Norwegian kingdom remained dismembered by these three. The last mentioned of them, Óláfr Skautkonungr, is the first historically indisputable figure to consolidate during his lifetime some personal power over both the Gautar and Svíar. He is also the founderer of the first Swedish bishopric in Skara.

Over the next ten-odd years Sveinn warred with King Æthelred, causing him to briefly flee to his in-laws in Normandy, and with Æthelred's son Edmund Ironside. Ultimately, Sveinn's son Cnut (= ON Knútr Ríki) emerged as the sole king of England in late 1016 AD. Before long Cnut also succeeded his royal brother in Denmark and was probably crowned its ruler in Viborg in 1019 AD.[56] After a likely military success in 1027 AD, Cnut claimed the title of 'King of all England and Denmark and of' the Norwegians 'and part of' the Svíar.[57] In spite of it, his ascendancy in the east was curbed after his half- or stepbrother Óláfr Skautkonungr's preceding removal and the subsequent ascension of Óláfr's son, King Ǫnundr-Jakob (r. 1022 – *c.* 1050). The elimination of the Jelling dynasty's proxies from Hlaðir also undermined its domination over Norwegian potentiates. The same party that had once been abetted by Cnut to drive away and kill in battle another confrontational Ynglingar–Hárfagri proselyte and consolidator, King Óláfr Haraldsson (r. 1015–1028, d. 1030), then restored the latter's son Magnús inn Góði (r. 1035–1047).

Cnut left a network of new, intermarried Anglo-Scandinavian high elite[58] and many mutual dynastic claims, so that a succession crisis followed the death in January 1066 AD of King Æthelred's childless son Edward the Confessor (r. 1042–1066). His brother-in-law Earl Harold, son of Cnut's promoted Earl Godwine (*c.* 1001–1051), routed Magnús inn Góði's paternal uncle King Haraldr Sigurðarson (r. 1047–1066) and his invading army in Yorkshire. But merely three weeks later Harold perished himself in the Battle of Hastings

54 …*sér vann Danmǫrk alla ok Norveg ok dani gerði kristna* (DR 42).
55 II Atr, pp. 220–226.
56 Hjermind 2022.
57 …*rex totius Angliae et Denemarciae et Norreganorum et partis Suanorum* (Cn 1027:Prologue, p. 276).
58 Missuno 2020.

in Sussex against the Norman claimant William I (r. 1035/1066–1087). The battle signalled the conventional end of the Anglo-Saxon period and the beginning of the Norman Conquest of England, in course of which the native elite was dispossessed and supplanted by William's. Cnut's maternal nephew King Sveinn Ástríðarson (r. 1047–1076) of Denmark and Haraldr Sigurðarson's grandson King Magnús Berfœttr (r. 1093–1103) of Norway would still raid in the British Isles. But the four countries' ruling families rather spent most of the 12th century fighting among themselves, which is a sure hallmark of a failed lasting political consolidation[59] above the previously achieved one-kingdom level. The Viking Age in the West and the political North Sea chronotope it had brought together were thus over.

1.5.2 Key Social and Institutional Backdrops

This historical game of thrones played out against a very slow but nowhere near exhaustive gradual build-up of, in the Anglo-American sociologist Michael Mann's terminology, 'intensive' and 'diffused power' to supplement 'extensive' and 'authoritative power'.[60] Many such elements originated to meet rulers' patrimonial needs[61] but were applied to a – streamlined and stripped down thanks to militarisation – Foucauldian public governmentality. Some recent scholarship has debated the objectively measurable post-Roman martialisation, the preferred term among some. However, an underlying mindset undeniably exhibited all signs of a "militarised society" proposed by the British medievalist Edward James.[62] Such societies often collage combatants and non-combatants, army chiefs on top of commander corps and heads of polities with civil personnel under them, and highly esteem war ethos and symbolism, weapons as status symbols, etc. As will become evident in Chapters 3–4, martialisation inherently belongs on the list of *thegns*' observable social features: for instance, Wulfstan presented military gear as a *sine qua non* of a *thegn*'s status, and ON *þegn* figures as a stock lexeme in a formula for universal war levy.

1.5.2.1 sinews of governance

Administrative essentials of Mann's 'intensive' and 'diffused power' greater underpinned the Cerdicings' rulership, additionally facilitated by the Church's contribution to political legitimacy, administrative models, and the instrumentalisation of literacy in governance routines. The Cerdicings commanded a network of manorial stewards-turned-lower-level-officials (OE *gerēfa* > MODE *reeve*), later topped by a provincial administrator cadre (OE *scīrmann* and *scīrgerēfa* > MODE *sheriff*).[63] An according grid of thirty-odd shires, comprising hundreds/wapentakes and little changed in its borders till 1889, had recycled and superimposed earlier territorial building blocks and terminology, taking a recognisable form beginning in the later part of the 10th century (*cf.* Map 7). Coupled with a kingdom-wide fiscal-cadastral land assessment in Saxon *hides* (OE *hīd*, LAT. *hida* in *Domesday Book*, *mansa*, *cassata* and the like

59 An *a contrario* argument lifted from Wickham 2005, p. 345, who treats dynastic rivalries as 'signs of the *success* of each kingdom, for such families (often probably the descendants of the rulers of former independent polities) could, one might have thought, have gone for independence as easily as for wider rule' (italics in the original).

60 Mann 2012, pp. 7–10.

61 Kingdom as patrimony has been extensively studied in the Norwegian case: e.g., Agisjev 2020; Dørum and Holberg 2017, pp. 130–133, – mostly in polemics with Claus Krag.

62 Halsall 2021.

63 (Shire-)reeves have been recently independently studied in depth by Shields-Más 2013 and Lloyd 2014. As far as I am aware, at the moment this book was being prepared, Dr Shield-Más was reworking her doctoral thesis into a separate monograph. Antecedent to it there came out Shield-Más 2023.

in pre-Conquest royal diplomas), Kentish *sulungs* (< OE *sulh*, lit. plough),[64] and "Danelaw" *carucates* (LAT. *carucata* < *caruca*, lit. heavy plough), this system allowed tighter control and harsher exploitation of human resources, such as raising mercenary impost (OE *heregeld*). Post-Conquest continuity among royal servitors[65] suggests that the management of royal resources on the ground could run independently of the monarch on the throne.

In Scandinavia, with its smaller population and smaller economic surplus, what kings' stewards and manors[66] there were to be found (e.g., ON *landhirðir*, *bryti*, *ármaðr*, later LAT. *villicus*)[67] probably had less room to impact society at large. The crucial societal role is instead attributed to communal assemblies (ON *þing*, anglicised "thing"), dominated and steered by the strong and mighty and at the highest levels serving as fora in probable precursors to law-provinces.[68] Christianity had been long penetrating Northern Europe,[69] but kings only belatedly tapped into the Church's ideological and administrative potential by (and for whatever personal motivation) sponsoring evangelisation from above and founding sees.[70] Without the Church and its attendant doctrine of a divinely-ordered monarchy, and facing logistical challenges, high kingship long accepted autonomous regional power-holders' (ON *jarlar*, *hersar*, et al.) submission (voluntary or not) to one's personal charisma or, as is often believed about the Svía kings, some putative sacral authority (commonly associated with Uppsala). Only the Jelling dynasty, within its more traversable and compact core subjected area, probably enjoyed a somewhat stabler hold on them.[71] The Cerdicings and King Cnut's (supra)regional governors in England (LAT. *duces*, OE *ealdormenn*, later also *eorl* > MODE *earl*; also below, p. 199)[72] appeared an even 'more controllable version of a client king'.[73] The main venues of interaction with and of dissemination of royal ideology among them were royal Carolingian-style assemblies every now and again across the kingdom but predominantly in "Greater" Wessex (charted on Map 2). It was on such occasions, sometimes called OE *witenagemōt* (lit. assembly of the wise) in modern scholarship, that important decisions were agreed upon, some of which – diplomas and legal promulgations – are still available today thanks to them being recorded on parchment: a crucial source for §3.4.3. Scandinavian kingship, while not in ability for any documentary output in the Viking Age, was just as itinerant. Nordic rulers peregrinated across controlled districts from estate to estate, at which they and their retinues of a few dozen[74] consumed renders

64 On their relation, see BACS IV, pp. lxxviii–lxxix.

65 Williams 1995, chap 5.

66 E.g., a particular type of royal manor, *Husaby*, its age and importance to royal administration and sustenance have been at the forefront of many investigations but remain contentious (Christensen, Lemm, and Pedersen 2017).

67 Orning and Poulsen 2019, pp. 214–217; Brink 2021, pp. 108–117.

68 NORW. *lovområde*, *lagdømme*, SW. *lagsaga*, DAN. *retsområde*: Iversen 2020.

69 Overviewed from a mostly written-source perspective by, e.g., Sawyer and Sawyer 2003b, complemented by archaeological regional cases by, e.g., Hernæs 1993; Roesdahl 1993; Theliander 2005, – to mention only the already cited items.

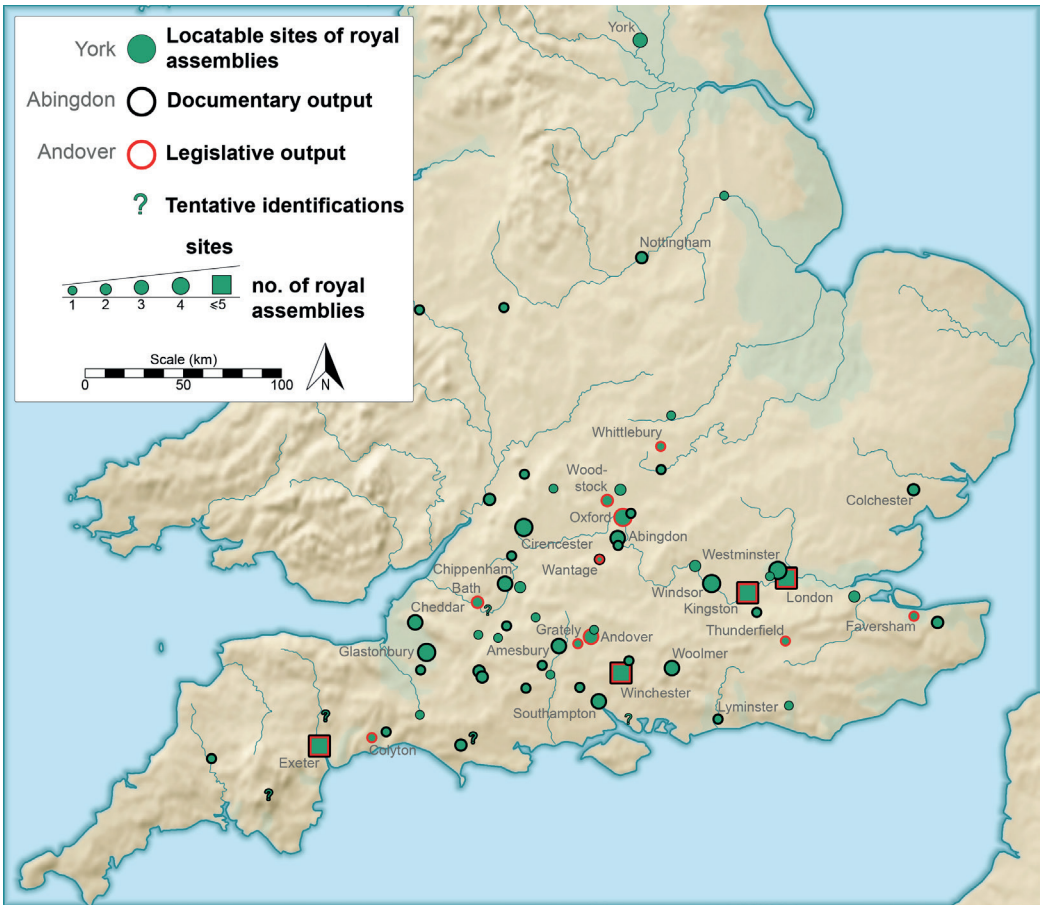
70 The topic has been extensively researched as part of the broader fascination with early state formation (see above, n. 42, plus Brink 2008a; Hagland 2011, in the collected works cited in this book). See healthy criticism of the near fetishisation of Christianisation in Scandinavia expressed by Henrik Janson across his many works.

71 Bolton 2009, chaps 7–8, examines the Jelling dynasty's interaction with power-holders in (Northern) Jutland and Skåne.

72 Chadwick 1905, chap 5; Hart 1973; Banton 1981; Baxter 2007; Williams 2008, chap 1; Blanchard 2023.

73 Lambert 2017, p. 117.

74 *Fagrskinna*, chap 3, p. 65, and *ÓlKrHkr*, chap 4, p. 207, speak of sixty men as the number of followers in the Ynglingar–Hárfagri's train that the *bœndr* conventionally agreed to entertain during royal iter.



Map 2. Places of known (royal) assemblies in England, 871–1066 AD (after Simon Keynes, with additions for the period before 900 AD). Authenticity of charters was disregarded whenever a site is known from documentary evidence only

in kind (ON *veizla*) from the locals. In both regions, kingship was tied to familial claim and could not do without other political actors' public assent. But whereas a Cerdicing rather gathered his 'greater subordinates' to hail him king, Nordic monarchs themselves attended major *þing* for acclamation at each (ON *konungstekja*) – in medieval Sweden, for example, the route and tour across law-provinces of a newly elected king was known as "Erik's Road" (SW. *Eriksgata*).

This latter fact dovetails with Anglo-Saxon and Nordic bodies politic as face-to-face communities then and later.[75] Within them, (high) kings sought to top-down engage its members, as much as was practicable, by means of lordships.[76] To pinpoint a single foundation and/or nature of such praxes may prove challenging. Both the "Germanist" *comitatus* (GER. *Gefolgschaft*, lit. retinue) as a following of a *war*lord's affectionate stalwart companions, and the "Romanist" "vassalage" as a set of rights and obligations towards a *liege*-lord arising under homage from fief-holding have been called out as misinterpretation of primary

75 Gelting 2010. Baxter and Lewis 2017, pp. 377–380, supply a most telling quantifiable precedent by King William I who together with some 150 barons – Dunbar's number – held 90% of all wealth in England, and he probably knew each and every of them personally.

76 Antonetti and Berardi 2023 may serve an Anglophone trailhead for the long historiography of lordship.

sources: Tacitus's *Germania* (*c.* 98 AD)[77] and the Lombard *Libri Feodorum* (*c.* 1100–1250 AD),[78] respectively. Notwithstanding, the increasing realisation that Tacitus catered to a Roman readership and its Koselleckian *Erfahrungsraum* ("space of experience") may suggest that chieftainly followings were not necessarily imaginary, because for his readers

> [i]n the early empire, *comitatus* specifically referred to the emperor's travelling retinue, usually (but not exclusively) when he was on campaign, and he was accompanied by senators and equestrians who were given the special title of *comes* for the duration of the expedition.[79]

The late imperial *comitatus* became, so to speak, a general staff and cabinet of ministers. In the same manner, rulers all across post-Roman Europe did maintain commended polyfunctional retinues that, with due socio-political sophistication, supplied military officers and civil officials (often indistinguishable due to martialisation). An early medieval *comitatus* engulfing the whole body politic as a sort of 'company of retainers in the king's service (*Königsgefolgschaft*)' was entertained by the German medievalist Heinrich Mitteis (1889–1952). He still tolerated but did not prioritise a chimeric "Germanic loyalty" as a putative social adhesive.[80] Once abstracted to a literary ethos, fit for a martialised society[81] (henceforth, "Tacitean *comitatus*") and (un)consciously presented as a social fact to match Tacitus's and his milieu's Koselleckian *Erwartungshorizont* ("horizon of expectation") of exoticising, noble-savage ethnography, a *comitatus*-lordship may cautiously come into its own. Hierarchies in such structures apparently syncretised ideal-typical Weberian 'patrimonialism' and 'feudalism'. But even in the latter case of 'a contract between near equals' an according lexis could obsolesce.[82] The less equal party could adopt nomenclature, if not concepts, connected with the 'patriarchal authority within the household'[83] of the former case,[84] per-

77 (Refreshingly early) Chadwick 1905, pp. 351–352 (n. 1); Murray 1983, pp. 51–65; Fanning 1997, pp. 17–38; Summer 2021, – *cf.* Stefanovich 2012, *passim* (for Tacitus, pp. 52–54, 69–79, 123–128).

78 Reynolds 1994, with keen reaction: of the otherwise cited items throughout this book, see Bagge, Gelting, and Lindkvist 2011, and the latest at the time of publication review in a modern edition by Stella 2023, pp. 46–52.

79 Davenport and McEvoy 2023, p. 6, – see also other chapters in the same volume touching on the imperial *comitatus*. It ought to be mentioned that in republican Rome, generals would have *consilia* (lit. councils) of fiends and various allies, so *comitatus* was not, strictly speaking, an invention of the principate. I owe this observation to Lewis Webb.

80 Mitteis 1975, pp. 11, 34 (pp. 10, 34 in the original 1940/1953 German edition). Mitteis's admittance of an institutional "Germanic loyalty" sometimes forced otherwise awkward concessions, such as in his description of the early Polish polity in which 'the prince and his company of retainers formed the nucleus of the government' (p. 166, and p. 176 in the original edition) "but it allows no comparison with the Germanic, because it lacked the element of fealty oath" (*…diese läßt sich aber insofern einer germanischen nicht vergleichen, als ihr das Element des Treueides fehlt*; abridged in the 1975 translation). Plassmann 1954 saw post-Carolingian Germany as a "*comitatus* state" (GER. *Gefolgschaftsstaat*; explicitly at p. 6) in very much the spirit of Mitteis, but engagement in National Socialism that must have informed his use of this term hardly helped its dissemination – *cf.*, however, doubts of Roach 2012, pp. 373–374.

81 Sketched by Rollason 2018, pp. 175–178. The list of previously not noted cases of "Tacitean *comitatus*" tropes collected by Clark 2011, as well as his parallels with Kara-Kirghiz, Bahima of Ancole, Xhosa, Fartaquin Arabic, Tamilian, Confucian, and Hindu literatures strongly support this view and retirement of "Germanic loyalty" as something unique.

82 Such as OE *gesīð*, lit. companion (Loyn 1955).

83 Mann 2012, pp. 171–172.

84 E.g., OE *hīred* (lit. household) > ON *hirð* (lit. king's following), OE *cniht* (see VIGNETTE 2), ON *húskarl* (lit. houseman > MODE *housecarl*), ON *heimþegi* (lit. home-receiver); OE *dryhten* and ON *dróttinn* as heads of warbands, OE *dryht* (> MODE *dright*) and ON *drótt*, respectively, in poetry at least very reminiscent of Tacitean *comitatus*, gave way to OE *hlāford* (< *hlāfweard*, lit. loaf-ward > MODE *lord* and also > ON *lávarðr*, a very likely Viking-Age borrowing) and ON *herra* (a later German borrowing) as generic names for a lord.

petuating one particular original servile term[85] in the modern generic labelling of such relationship corroborated by land tenure – "vassalage". A putatively exhaustive socio-juridical "feudo-vassalic" system, however, has been persuasively, if polemically, dismantled as a learned construct. Homage has been demonstrated to have existed as a more generic expression of a hierarchical relationship between senior and inferior parties and utilised in various social scenarios that did not imply servility until the high Middle Ages.[86] Thus, "commended person"[87] or "liegeman"[88] may count among preferable synonyms for a client in a dyadic and reciprocal relationship arising in verifiable cases of interpersonal subordination by pledge-giving and oath-taking, with or without land involved.

1.5.2.2 land and its people

Royal lordship expectedly advanced one's social chances, often through furthering pre-existing and/or solicited superiority over people. A variably paced tendency to territorialisation thereof is thought to have contributed to a slow conversion of concomitant superiority over land into landed proprietorship. Just as well is the said territorialisation attributed a part in turning conjectured tributary relationships into seigneurial, attested here and there.

National romantic historiographies, cross-pollinated by the German school of jurisprudence (GER. *historische Rechtsschule*), often contrasted later medieval feudalised to fundamentally "democratic Germanic" societies.[89] Accordingly, various lexemes drawn from primary sources were seen as indicators of these implied broad social strata, such as OE *ceorl* (> MODE *churl*)[90] and ON *bóndi* (archaic *búendi*, present participle of ON *búa*, lit. to live, reside, have a household; plur. *bændr*, archaic *búendr*). In Scandinavian scholarship, such a reading could be found as recently as the 1990s. By the end of that decade some branded it as romantic and outdated,[91] having 'no other foundation than the Bourgeois ideology of the 19th century'.[92] Contrarily, twenty years later Bjørn Poulsen and colleagues found support in Viking-Age poetry and high medieval legislation for the

> [...] general opinion of the older historiography, namely that society was made up of a large group of householders, *bændr*, on top of which stood a relatively small elite.[93]

The present, moderate consensus holds that in the second half of the first millennium AD, the rural Scandinavian landscape was being worked by labourers of various degrees of dependence on a narrower elite associated with magnate farms:[94]

> [...] isolated halls with associated buildings [that] often date from the late Roman period onwards, and frequently show settlement continuities into the eighth century and later.[95]

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85 LAT. *vass*(*al*)*us* < Celtic **gwas*, lit. young man, servant, and adjective *gwasswl* (lit. serving) (von Olberg 1991, pp. 231–234).
86 As exemplified by Roach 2012.
87 Particularly inspired by, e.g., Baxter 2007 (esp. chap 6).
88 As used by, e.g., Imsen 2000b.
89 Kristensen 1975, pp. 30–37; Poulsen and Sindbæk 2011, p. 4. See substantiation of historical context by Janson 1999, pp. 85–87; 2004, pp. 340–367; 2006, pp. 393–398.
90 Stenton 1970, pp. 383–393, which itself built on and continued his *Anglo-Saxon England* (chaps ix and xiv:1) and drew extensively on Wulfstanian texts, can be regarded as the culmination of this tradition.
91 Syrett 1998, pp. 249, 252.
92 Skre 1999, p. 419.
93 Poulsen, Vogt, and Sigurðsson 2019, p. 3. *Cf.* a consonant opinion by Jesch 2015, p. 98.
94 DAN./SW./NORW. *storman*(*n*/*d*)*sgård* or *storgård*, DAN./NORW. *hovedgård*, and other synonyms; also variously rendered in English as "demesne farms", "main farms" and less terminologically strictly "manors" or "estates".
95 Wickham 2005, p. 370.

They ran on unfree labour, on which there exists an impressive pool of scholarly literature. To keep this section focused, this book will engage the following concise definition of the Viking-Age conditions:

> [...] free status did not mean the freedom to do as one wished. It meant self-determination and inviolability within limits established by the community. The free person had honour – respect in the eyes of others and himself – and his honour protected him from encroachment by others, which is why it was so important.[96]

Honour came with a *wergild* (also spelt "wergeld": lit. man price): in origin (and theory) a monetary compensation paid for homicide to an aggrieved party.[97] Though not exactly seigneurial landlords, magnates nevertheless exercised "extensive lordship", to use Rosamond Faith's definition, over their free subordinates and extracted produce from them, even if as gifts of honour rather than pure economic rent.[98] Similar conditions have been construed for early Anglo-Saxon lowland Britain, which comprised 'a large number of' hundreds-*hide* land-units as 'political divisions, not yet estates', 'in every part of the country, fitting inside each other like Russian dolls'.[99] In the Viking Age, they started breaking up into smaller few-*hide* holdings, with the heavily exploited dependants and unfree cultivating the so-called "inland" and the personally free of the "warland" owing generally less burdensome and even commutable customary dues.[100] The inland (or demesne) was once believed to constitute a tax-free part of an estate, but this view has since been seriously challenged, at least in respect of the "second Viking Age".[101] The tendency of the former demographic category to expand at the latter's expense progressed together with increasing commodification of land.[102]

The emerging picture is that of a society exhibiting confluent rudiments of freedom and dependence and flexible social vocabulary. OE *ceorl* is a notoriously hard to define word without allowances and reservations. It applied to

> [...] a large and loosely defined social category [...], which included all those who were neither unfree nor of aristocratic birth,[103]

Ceorlas' inherent liberty may have been not exactly straightforward. Thus, for example, in King Alfred's border treaty with Guthrum, a *ceorl* on *gafolland* (lit. gavel land) is protected by the same *wergild* as a Danish freedman (OE *lȳsing* < ON *leysingi/leysingr*).[104] At the same time, modern DAN./SW./NORW. *bonde* (plur. *bønder/bönder*), which connotes a rural dweller and agricultural worker, sometimes with a spill-over effect into humbling or even derog-

96 Roesdahl and Sørensen 2003, p. 132.
97 RLGA XXXIII, pp. 457–463 (*s.v.* "Wergeld"). Numerous studies (presently trailheaded in English by Bothe, Esders, Nijdam 2021) show it was more multi-purposed than just a means to regulate actively debated vendettas: Byock 1982; Miller 1990; Halsall 1998; Niles 2015b; Lambert 2018a. *Wergild* expressed, among other things, social status and ethnic affiliation and functioned as a decisive factor in assigning legal ranks in the terminological sense (below, §1.6.2; WBEASE, pp. 489–490 [*s.v.* "WERGILD"]) not only in "Germanic" societies (*cf.* Kelly 1988, pp. 7–10).
98 Orrman 2003, pp. 299–306; Poulsen and Sindbæk 2011a; Iversen and Myking 2019, pp. 32–34.
99 Wickham 2005, p. 325.
100 Lambert 2017, pp. 111–113. See further below, n. 925.
101 Pratt 2013.
102 Naismith 2012; 2016.
103 Quote from Rosamond Faith after Parsons 2013, pp. 50–52 (n. 21), also containing some critique of Stenton's views, reinforced through place-name scholarship. References to specific studies of this lexeme and social category behind have been collected by Pons-Sanz 2007a, p. 175 (n. 8); see also Karasawa 2016.
104 AGu 2, p. 126.

atory evaluations ("rustics", "yokel"), may confuse ON *bóndi*'s wide semantic range (from "husband" to "villager"). This original term is often obliquely rendered "husbandman" or "farmer" in modern English,[105] but crucially

> [...] initially, all free men were termed *bønder* [...] Only gradually, aristocrats, lay elites, became a separate group within the group of *bønder* and the term *bonde* began to designate an allodial farmer, a freeholder with a standard farm.[106]

Various points of reference add to how greatly the estimated level of social egalitarianism, independence from higher authorities, and freedom to self-determination among the *bændr* may depend on the eye of the beholder. The Norwegian medievalist Hans Jacob Orning notes a historiographical paradox in how Icelandic scholars tend to contrast the pre-1262 AD insular "Free-State" society with the Norwegian "monarchical tyranny", while at the same time their Norwegian colleagues oppose the Norwegian "society of freeholders" (NORW. *bondesamfunnet*) to the "hierarchical European feudalism" permeated by inequality and exploitation.[107]

***

From a long-term perspective, the strictly regionally pertinent, comparatively lower steepness of the Nordic social pyramid may impress as "primordially egalitarian". But fundamentally both societies still emerge as complex and stratified. Regardless of initial origins, socio-political structures atop them shared certain practical commonalities, some differences appearing quantitative: King Alfred had some thirty focal sites (OE *burh*) fortified, while King Haraldr Blátǫnn had only six (known so far) comparable Trelleborg-type ringforts built. Other, qualitative divergences often arose from varying preconditions, which can explain a general "phase lead" in lowland Britain,[108] as in how Alfred's boroughs predated Haraldr's ringforts by about a century. Intense contacts, it has been argued, spurred (not necessarily conscious) changes,[109] variously paced by local circumstances: late Viking-Age Danish kings already putatively collected revenues by royal prerogative,[110] but King Cnut's imposts of a similar nature just a few decades earlier stirred up the Norwegians.[111] The slowest change arguably was the working out of administrative fundamentals as buttresses to personal political gravitas and leadership qualities. Erecting labour-intensive structures for communal benefit – such as the great defensive ramparts of Götavirke and even more impressive Danevirke, hillforts, local pile barricades – could hardly do without some sort of human resource management. Notwithstanding, certain elements of future Scandinavian

105 Jesch 2013, pp. 82–86.

106 Poulsen 2023, p. 140, echoing a similar observation by Gelting 2011, p. 163.

107 Orning 2017, pp. 306–307. Imsen 2012 had taken the argument even farther and argued, against preceding Norwegian historiography and its concentration on the medieval Norwegian aristocracy, that the high medieval kingdom of Norway was no less than a "*bændr* state" (*cf.* Dørum and Holberg 2017, pp. 231–235).

108 Sawyer 1993.

109 On the Norwegian precedent, while radical in his interpretations, Sawyer 1999 provides a fair number of potential empirical consequences for state-building of such contacts. Molyneaux 2015, pp. 26, 45–47, explains the Cerdicings' forging of a new, expanded kingdom as a pursuit to liquidate the military threat in the wake of Scandinavian settlement in Britain.

110 Skovgaard-Petersen 2003, pp. 180–183, – though the evidence is imperfect; *cf. Knýtlinga Saga*, chap 28, pp. 145–147, which purports the Danish kings' monopoly on the common and unsettled lands about the same time.

111 Bolton 2009, pp. 275–287. See further Larrea 2023, §§3.1.1–2 and 4.1.1–2.

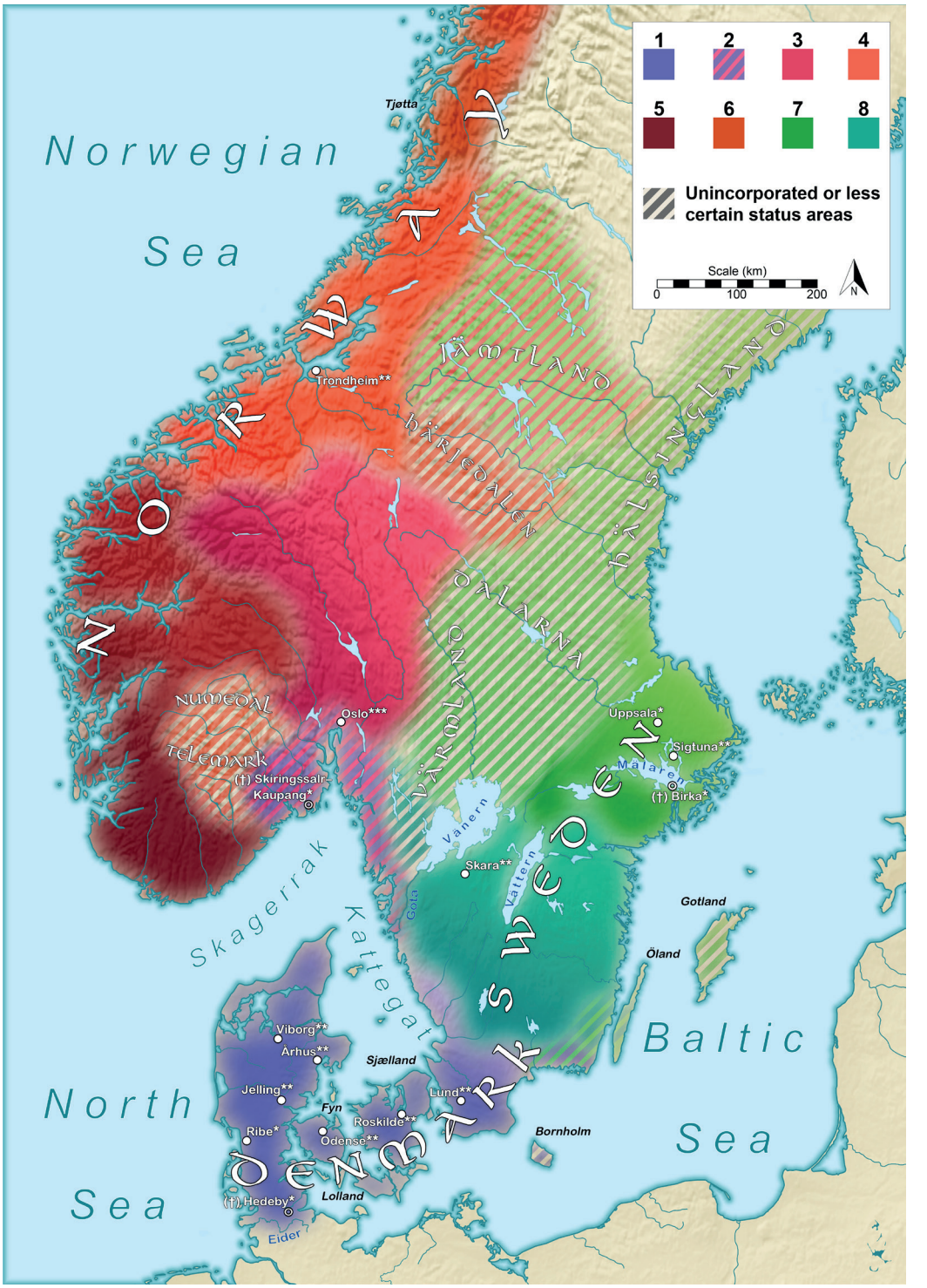
Opposite:[112] The ethno-political landscape of lowland Britain, bounded by British and Scots polities to the west and north, following the "first Viking Age" may be divided along two tentative axes: socio-institutional imposition of West Saxon royal governance and regional ethno-social composition. A rough-and-ready picture is helped by toponymic, linguistic, and archaeological data; Domesday borders and fiscal and administrative terminology (with Old Norse potentially indicating active local governance involvement by its speakers); and later schematic division of England into conventional West Saxon, Mercian, and Danish "laws" (such as in *Þe Syren and Hundredes of Engelonde* from Oxford, Jesus College, MS 29, fols. 194r–195r, and in the *Leges Henrici Primi*), though these data do not always overlap perfectly.

Wessex (colour 1) served the bedrock of royal regime and, by King Alfred's reign, had absorbed all territories south of the Thames, although Cornwall long stayed least affected or controlled. The local West Saxon "law" was administered through Anglo-Saxon *hides* and hundreds. The part of Mercian kingdom in the hands of his subordinate Ealdorman (LAT. *rex* in Æthelweard's translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, however) Æthelred and not reached by the vikings (hence also referred to as "English Mercia") and bounded in the west by Welsh principalities beyond "Offa's dyke", was a land of the "Mercian law", *hides*, and hundreds (colour 2), annexed after Æthelflæd's death in 918 AD. The resultant polity is sometimes called "Greater" Wessex, as its two parts aligned closest on both suggested axes. All other shires supposedly used the "Danish law". Southern "Danish Mercia" and Essex had been conquered by Edward the Elder shortly before consuming "English Mercia". Only few Old Norse toponyms and use of *hides* and hundreds instead of Scandinavian *carucates* and wapentakes, accordingly, suggest its lesser relative Scandinaviasation (colour 4). The Cerdicings' domination was then rapidly spread into the rest of "Danish Mercia" and soon after into the medium Scandinaviased East Anglia (colour 5), later divisible into "north-" and "south-folk" (< ON *fylki*?) and abounding with Old Norse place names. Here, the administrative unit was the hundred (sometimes further divisible into "ferdings" < ON *fjórðungr*, lit. a quarter) but the fiscal one the *carucate*. A Scandinavian polity ruled from York (hence also called the "Kingdom of York") since 866/876 AD replaced the former Anglian Northumbrian sub-kingdom of Deira between the Pennines, Humber, and Tees, sometimes also exercising some control in, e.g., Lincoln further south. The Cerdicings' upper hand reached here in 927 AD, but receded shortly thereafter and also momentarily from Northern "Danish Mercia", – or the "Five Boroughs" (Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby, Leicester, Stamford; although it is implausible that they constituted any joint polity, and the list could have been literary) as it was called in an Old English poem describing its quick recapture in 942 AD and in III Atr 1:1, p. 228. Some rulers of York minted coin also in Lincoln, but with York's final Scandinavian king's, Eiríkr (Blóðøx?), expulsion in 954 AD, these territories were the last to lose sovereignty. Consequentially, they experienced the strongest Scandinaviasation (colour 6), reflected in a concentration of Old Norse toponyms and use of wapentakes (in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire grouped into "ridings" < ON *þriðjungr*, lit. a third part) and *carucates*. Former Northumbrian sub-kingdom of Bernicia further north continued as an autonomous Anglian polity (or the "Earldom of Bamburgh" after its dynasty's seat; colour 3) under the Cerdicings' nominal political patronage and from *c.* 963/966 AD merged with the former York polity into one ealdordom, but it was left uncharted by the Domesday inquest north of the Tees and with its northern part beyond the Tweed (historic Lothian) later becoming Scottish.

Some uncertainty persists. The demarcating zigzag traced in the Anglo-Scandinavian post-878 AD treaty between Alfred and Guthrum apparently reckoned Essex as under control of the "great heathen army". But Essex never formed part of East Anglia, to where Guthrum's remaining troops had eventually retreated. The border continued up to the old Roman road (the Watling Street), but whether it ran along the road further north-west got (perhaps, intentionally) no mention. Nor was it used in establishing shire limits. The area between it and the Thames was governed by *hides* and hundreds and must have pertained to "English Mercia" in Alfred's lifetime, yet *Þe Syren and Hundredes of Engelonde* sorted it together with shires under the "Danish", not "Mercian law". The latter, conversely, supposedly applied between the rivers Mersey and Ribble – the territory that long remained out of West Saxon institutional reach and featured Norwegian settlers. They also spread among the indigenous inhabitants of historic Cumbria between the Ribble and Solway Firth that would not become part of England until only after the Norman Conquest. Altogether, all of Pennine south-western foot-hills and up to the Irish Sea probably remained a frontier zone as it was only patchily covered by the Domesday inquest.

112 Map 3 is primarily based on the information from the following publications: Hill 1981, maps 68–69, 174–176; Downham 2008; Molyneaux 2015, pp. 15–25; Baker and Brookes 2013; McGuigan 2018; Insley 2021a–b.

Map 3. Approximate socio- and ethno-political configuration of lowland Britain, *c.* 871–1066 AD



Map 4. Approximate ethno-political configuration of Viking-Age mainland Scandinavia. Hollow dots and (†) mark focal sites abandoned before the end of the Viking Age. Asterisks indicate century of foundation: * 9th century (or before), ** 10th century, *** 11th century

Opposite:[113] A detailed Nordic Viking-Age mainland ethno-political geography, bounded by the Sámi and Balto-Finnic peoples in the north and east, is notoriously challenging to visualise in one map. An attempt in this vein below is rather a preliminary bare-bones graphic framework, further augmented by Map 1.

Already in the early 9th century, King *Guðfriðr/Guð(f)røðr and his immediate successors exercised some supremacy over a territory resembling the later medieval Danish kingdom (colour 1). It stretched up to the pre-existing defensive rampart of Danevirke and the river Eider at the neck of Jutland in the south, the future borders of Skåne in the east, and the western coast of the Oslo-fjord in the north. In the 880–890s, the Danish domination also ran up the coast of Skagerrak and Kattegat, to judge from the Norwegian Ohthere's (= ON Óttarr) account about his journey to *Sciringes heal(h)* (most probably Skíringssalr–Kaupang) and then to Hedeby at the eastern end of Danevirke, in which text the name of the country first occurs (OE *Denemearc* < ON *Danmǫrk*, first attested in DR 42). In later times, the province of Blekinge east of Skåne and the island of Bornholm were under the Danish kings' control. But according to the immediate continuation of Óttarr's travelogue by another voyager Wulfstan, Blekinge then "belonged to" or "obeyed" (= paid tribute?) the *Swēonas* (i.e. the Svíar?), and Bornholm had its own king.

From at least the 9th century, a shoreline string of northern tribes/chiefdoms/petty kingdoms (ON *fylki*, *herað*, *ríki*, et al.) in the fjords and mountain valleys passed under a collective name, first rendered as LAT. *Nortuagia* and OE *Norðweg* (< ON *Nór[v]egr*), that later also covered inlands. Together, these thirty-odd chieftaincies are breakable into five regions overall congruent with later Norwegian law-provinces. In the far north, lay Óttarr's homeland, Hálogaland (NORW. *Hålogaland*, colour 6), then probably ruled by Jarl Hákon Grjótgarðsson. South of it, along the Trondheim-fjord, eight local *fylki* since long gravitated together under a collective name "Þrœndalǫg" (NORW. *Trøndelag*, colour 4) where no own dynasty is known. Þrœndalǫg formed the kernel of the Frostuthing law-province and remained under the rule of Hákon's family up until King Óláfr Haraldsson's reign. South-west stretched a chain of coastal petty kingdoms, the apparent core territory of the Ynglingar–Hárfagri and the future Gulathing law-province (colour 5), called the "middle land" by *Heimskringla* (ON *mitt land*; *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 33, p. 137; *cf. ÓlTrHkr*, chap 15, p. 240, and *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 29, p. 36, quoting and probably influenced by Ótt *Hfl* 15). The small chieftaincies east of it and along the coasts of the Oslo-fjord, generally corresponding with the Borgarthing law-province and periodically claimed by Danish dynasts, were referred to as "the Vík" (colour 2). North of it lay the petty kingdoms of the "upper lands" (ON *Upplǫnd*, colour 3), integrated latest into the realm and the core of the Eidsivathing law-province. The pre-medieval status of Þelamǫrk (NORW. *Telemark*) and Numadalr (NORW. *Numedal*) in-between the three last mentioned law-provinces is ambiguous. The few Norse-speaking settlers north-west of Upplǫnd came under the Norwegian kings' control only in the 12th century when the least populous provinces of Herjádálr (SW. *Härjedalen*) and Jamtaland (SW. *Jämtland*) were formed.

To the mind of the German chronicler Adam of Bremen in the late 1070s, there existed a kingdom around the great Swedish lakes, LAT. *Sueonia*, loosely constituted by two communities – Gautland (SW. *Götaland*) in the south (colour 8) and Svíþjóð (SW. *Svealand*) in the north (colour 7), – and long separated by hard to traverse wooded terrain of Kolmården, Tylöskog, and Tiveden. Gautland further divided along the south-north axis of the lake Vättern. Vestrgautland (SW. *Västergötland*) bordered the Danish territories in the south and south-west and the Vík in the north-west along the river Göta until a later expansion at some point north of the lake Vänern (modern SW. *Dalsland*). A narrow strip of coast around the Göta's mouth would be annexed after 1200 AD. Before the carving of the medieval Tiohärad law-province (modern SW. *Småland*) out of Austrgautland (SW. *Östergötland*), the latter extended south along the Baltic shore. But the voyager Wulfstan testified that Möre on the coast "belonged to" or "obeyed" (= paid tribute?) the *Swēonas* (i.e. the Svíar?). Toponymic and linguistic evidence also points to Svíþjóð's local influence, but if it entailed any political consequences cannot be known. Svíþjóð had its core around the lake Mälaren and exercised some sort of domination in the surrounding areas. Besides Möre, Wulfstan reported the islands of Öland, later included in the Austrgautland law-province, and Gotland as Swedish, though the native tradition later presented Gotland as voluntarily entering a reciprocal relationship with kings of the Swedes. The then-sparse population of Vermaland (SW. *Värmland*) north of the Vänern came, *Heimskringla* states, from Svíþjóð, but also allegedly conquered by King Haraldr inn Hárfagri. Vermaland and the future provinces of Helsingjaland (SW. *Hälsingland*) along the coast and thinly-settled Dalarna (ON *Jernbaraland* of Old Norse texts) further inland seem to have been integrated into the Swedish kingdom only in the Middle Ages.

113 Map 4 is primarily based on the information from the following publications: Helle 1993; Lindkvist 2003b; Christiansen 2002, chap 4; Brink 2007; Hybel 2018, pp. 317–322; Iversen 2020; 2021.

administrations show through only in low resolution[114] and push assumptions of their possible Viking-Age coordinative capacities and functions into the realm of learned speculation. It was this early "governmentisation" that gained momentum under King Edgar and essentially carved out from the rest of Britain the affected territories that became "England". Up till then the Cerdicings ruled mediately through 'greater subordinates' in a manner also reconstructible in contemporary Scandinavia[115] where heterarchy, or a power organisation that

> [...] comprises elements that do not simply exist within an ordered system of ranks or precedence,[116]

– generally gave way to hierarchies at a more drawn-out and locally conditioned pace.

1.6 Theoretical Frame of Reference and Context

In the opening chapter of his four-volume œuvre, Michael Mann asserts that 'empirical data do not make sense on their own. We need to import theories to give them meanings'.[117] It is therefore worthwhile to briefly outline the theoretical framework used throughout the book.

1.6.1 Key Theoretical Premises

1.6.1.1 elites

The key concept and one of certain universals among most non-egalitarian societies potentially useful for this study is that of an *elite* (< FR. *élite*, lit. chosen [person], < LAT. *electus*, of the same meaning), previously mentioned several times above. This concept was introduced to the sociological theory by two Italian scholars, the economist and sociologist Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) and the lawyer and sociologist Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941). In the main, both

> [...] argued that every society produces a ruling minority that concentrates wealth and prestige, thus forming an elite that is by its very essence linked to power.[118]

As can be deduced from Mosca's terminological preference for the "ruling" or "political class", for him, elites were primarily all those who by virtue of superior organisational (though not necessarily meritocratic) skills seized political power. Pareto's take was somewhat wider, for he, though also concentrating on the decision-makers, spoke of elites as broadly the most successful individuals in any given human occupation.[119] Though in 'the long run [Pareto's] definition has proved too simplistic for modern societies',[120] the very concept has confirmed its worth. At the start of the 21st century, it served the focal point

114 E.g., the district terms *herred/härad* (< ON *herað*) and *hundare* (< OSW. *hundari*) are known already in the late 11th century (from the earliest Danish diploma and U 212), but an utmost inconsistent later administrative terminology and its blurring overlaps (Love et al. 2020, pp. 519–523 [Appendix A]) strongly suggest haphazard earlier divisions in place of uniform primitive structures.

115 *Cf.* Molyneaux 2015, chaps 2–3, and Lindkvist 2003a.

116 Line 2007, p. 7, with references to pioneering works by Carole L. Crumley at p. 640 but not her later contributions. The concept of "heterarchy" has seen further use in anthropologically inspired archaeological studies, e.g., by Löfving 2001. For a recent overview, see Crumley 2023.

117 Mann 2012, pp. ix, 4. *Cf.* a consonant opinion by Knut Kjeldstadli (Orning 2008, p. 295).

118 Bougard, Bührer-Thierry, and Le Jan 2013, p. 738.

119 Bottomore 1976, pp. 12–13.

120 Bougard, Bührer-Thierry, and Le Jan 2013, p. 738.

for a seminal Franko–German project *Elites in the Early Middle Ages* (FR. *Les Élites au Haut Moyen Âge*) that in the years 2003–2009 produced eight collected volumes on the problem. In what follows, the definition used throughout that project shall be adopted. It reads:

> The élites are all those who enjoy a high social position [...] [which means] the possession of wealth, power, and knowledge as well as recognition by others.[121]

This approach proved its value and was more recently employed in a similar pan-Scandinavian research project *Nordic Elites in Transformation, c. 1050–1250* that yielded three volumes in 2019–2021. Each consequentially spotlighted material resources, social networks, and the legitimisation of Scandinavian elites. In applying the concept of elite to this book's object of study, the two aforenamed projects often served as inspiration.

Likewise sound appear most of the theoretical key points of the former project, later summarised in a separate article by François Bougard, Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, and Régine Le Jan (2013). For the sake of simplicity, a brief recapitulation of their premises should be in order:

- The "high social position" (*alias* "elite status") can be achieved by various strategies. These include but are not limited to birth, wealth, marital relations, office-holding, education, or ruler's favour[122] (in medieval research often called by its German name, *Königsnähe*, lit. proximity to the king, initially used in studies off Carolingian and Ottonian material on the Continent).[123]
- The elite status is not a thing in itself and is 'less a question of definition than of perception, that is to say, of social recognition'. For this reason, membership in an elite hinges on the acknowledgement and im- or explicit confirmation by peers and/or a legitimate higher authority (if it exists).[124] The medievalist Timothy Reuter (1947–2002) had additionally elaborated that the assertion of an elevated standing is achieved through social and cultural hegemony, often performed through ritualised public action.[125] Scholars agree that an elite status gets practically expressed in such markers as habitus, consumption, culture, and lifestyle.
- Social elites are characterised by internal hierarchies, 'whether of prestige, wealth, or power' that 'tended to merge together to form a single one [...] hierarchy, determined by the social status and dominant position. Within this structure, a series of gradations formed dividing lines that were not always easy to distinguish'.
- Functionally, elites' most important social role seems to narrow down to serving as mediators between variously positioned social strata and the political authorities, as well as to partaking in public administration and governance as a whole.

121 Feller 2006, p. 6.

122 In his earlier book, Wickham 2005, pp. 153–154, listed similar criteria as 'making up an "ideal-type" aristocrat'. On the definition of "aristocracy" as used in this research, see below, §1.6.2.2.

123 The German medievalist Karl Schmid (1923–1993) may be the originator of this term that in his 1959 article (below, n. 154) comes up (unelaborated on) at p. 4 (left not translated in the 1978 English rendition; my thanks to Anastasia Anufrieva for consulting me on Schmid's historiographical legacy). The term has received wide appreciation, e.g., by Gerd Althoff. By now, the topic is vast, so only an introductory reading can be indicated, e.g., McKitterick 1995, chaps 15–16.

124 *Cf.* a very similar observation in Wickham 2016, p. 197.

125 Reuter 2006, pp. 111–126. The term "cultural hegemony" to describe an elite's assertive behaviour was first introduced into sociological research by another Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). See an overview and discussion by Lears 2006 (original article published in 1985).

A number of interdependent reasons make such theoretical framework particularly applicable to *thegns* on the two coasts of the North Sea to a first approximation. First, the very attention of the sources the *thegns* enjoyed: both in England and Scandinavia, literate people considered them important enough to give them space in the limited media. Second, the supposed level of influence *thegns* probably exerted within their respective societies is highlighted by an abundance of sources referring to them, as well as the part they play in them – the two fragments from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Fagrskinna* quoted above (p. 5) serve a prime example thereof. Third, in terms of methodology, unlike original, commonly comparative/superlative and moral terms found in the primary sources (LAT. *nobilitas*, *proceres*, *optimates*, *seniores*, OE *æþelboren*, *betstboren*, ON *góðir menn*, *velbornir*, etc.), which could at times demonstrate a judgmental character, emotional and moral neutrality of the word "elite" gives it flexibility and academic applicability.[126]

Importantly, classifying *thegns* in stricter sociological terms makes them a historically comparable phenomenon and the achieved results translatable into wider research.[127] Taking a step back from England and Scandinavia, we additionally find that *thegns* seem to fit another broader pattern that reinforces the preliminary applicability of the suggested sociological theory of elites. Mosca observed *inter alia* that,

> [...] below the highest stratum in the ruling class there is always [...] another that is much more numerous and comprises all the capacities for leadership in the country.[128]

If we zoom out, we find that such two-tier divisions were a common place for elites across history. Nomenclatures are inconsistent and sometimes subjective (or even impressionistic at times), but one can indicate ancient Roman *senatores* and *equites*; high medieval English hereditary titled nobility and country gentry; Iberian *ricohombría/rico-homens* (later *grandes*) and *caballeros* (later *hidalguía/fidalguia*); early modern Polish *magnateria* and *szlachta*; Muscovian *gosudarev dvor* (often anachronistically called *boyars*) and various divisions of less or even non-aristocratic *dvoryane* and *sluzhilye ljudi* (lit. servitors); Edo-period Japanese *daimyō* and *buke* (colloquially and somewhat anachronistically called *samurai*); etc. Previous research strongly suggests that on both coasts of the North Sea, *thegns* seem to fit this niche of Mosca's elite lower stratum, because however one lines up local hierarchies, *thegns* stand below Anglo-Saxon ealdormen/earls and Scandinavian jarls but above the "common folk" (motivated and further demonstrated below, §§3.3.11.2, 4.3.1.2, 4.4.3.1–2). In both societies, in good accord with Mosca's point, we find *thegns* engaged in helming their respective local (sometimes provincial) communities. Similarly, they appear far more numerous than the respective elite's upper crusts. In *thegns*, we are thus dealing with more than just a limited and unparalleled phenomenon.

As noted by Bougard and colleagues,

> [...] however vague and sometimes irritating the concept of elites may appear, it is still highly operative for the societies of the early Middle Ages, in which the concentration of prestige,

126 See, for example, how LAT. *nobilitas* and its cognates evidently imply moral qualities (and high social status connoting celebrity and notability) in the antiquity but starts to also connote social status in Carolingian Francia (Nelson 2000), which conflation is not at all helpful in scholarly research.

127 *Cf.* similar notes by Poulsen, Vogt, and Sigurðsson 2019, pp. 2, 3. Crick 2009 pursues a like case when she goes supraregional in marking out political and economic attributes of early medieval British social elites.

128 Quotation after Davenport 2019, p. 10. I would like to thank Lewis Webb for indicating this work to me.

> wealth, and power within the same hands guaranteed remarkable social stability over the long term.[129]

1.6.1.2 social stratification

The expression "high social position" (or status) presupposes other social positions/statuses that it is high relative to, which in turn invites some discussion of social stratification. As agreed by anthropologists, stratification effectively reflects the amount of social power at the disposal of a community's member. Michael Mann states that,

> [s]ocial stratification is the overall creation and distribution of power in society.[130]

His apt formula resonates with his senior colleague, Morton Fried's (1923–1986), slightly narrower understanding of social stratification as the unequal

> [...] access to the basic resources that sustain life [among people] of the same sex and equivalent age status,[131]

– if the word "resource" is to be broadly treated. Thus, in a wide sense, social stratification can be understood as a hierarchy of individuals' standings in a given community and the power to act. The Austrian medievalist Michael Mitterauer further nuances that,

> [a] uniform stratification system of a society requires uniform assessment of standings within this society.[132]

This assessment can be measured on the scale of prestige, peculiar to a given society and shared by all its members. As a vital ideological constituent of social status, prestige is acquired and conveyed through symbolic means. It does not have to depend on power but hinges upon authority: in Fried's terms, a variant of power that normally does not require threat and has, at least theoretically, more to do with influence than sanction.[133]

1.6.2 Key Terminology

1.6.2.1 nomenclature of social groupings

A few words must be said on the essential terminology selected for this study. This is additionally called for in light of the highly variable vocabulary hitherto used in scholarship of *thegns*.[134] In the main, the suggested terms and underlying concepts take for their point of departure the German sociologist and thinker Max Weber's (1864–1920) classical essay *Machtverteilung innerhalb der Gemeinschaft: Klassen, Stände, Parteien*.[135] Given the linguistic gap

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129 Bougard, Bührer-Thierry, and Le Jan 2013, p. 767.

130 Mann 2012, p. 10. Power, of course, itself is a precarious sociological topic, delving into which does not meet my intentions. Mann's definition ('ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery of one's environment', at p. 6) will in the following be used as serviceable once more.

131 Fried 1967, p. 186.

132 Mitterauer 1977, p. 22.

133 Fried 1967, pp. 11–14.

134 Without singling out this one study, Banton 1981, pp. 272–273, is probably a good illustration of such versatility: over the span of merely two pages *thegns* are called 'king's servants', 'noblemen' ("aristocracy" is avoided throughout this work), 'major noble rank', 'social status', and 'order'. A similar versatility is admitted by the *Blackwell Encyclopedia* where in the relevant entry a *thegn* is characterised 'in terms of social class' as person of 'the highest rank' and a 'member of the nobility or landed aristocracy' (WBEASE, pp. 459–461 [*s.v.* "THEGN"]).

135 An English translation has been consulted: Weber 2010.

plus sociological and historical progress since its appearance, some further elaborations are warranted.

The expression "(social) class" originated in the 18th century and quickly took off, reflecting the changes in European social structures of the time. Henceforth it was often terminologically loaded in the sphere of economics, not least so by the Marxist tradition (where "class" presupposes dichotomous relations).[136] In modern English, "class" is often colloquially used 'in the loose sense of "group" or "stratum"'[137] and to denote 'real social groups that develop class consciousness and their own culture and lifestyle'.[138] The medievalist David Crouch notices that 'the word "class" is used a lot in scholarship on medieval society' to refer to

> [...] groups defined by function (in the case of knights and peasants) or in more open-ended socio-economic terms to do with level of income and standing within society...

Crouch further notes that social groupings were indeed perceived by medieval intellectuals, and that 'the sources are very much alive to ideas of hierarchy and individual status'. But, he continues, 'any common perception [...] that society was then arranged in a hierarchy of *groups*, or classes' (italics in the original) before the High Middles Ages (in his case, in England) is questionable.[139] In view of this imprecision and in spite of the frequent use,[140] to avoid confusion, unless in citations or quotations, the word "class" in application to Viking-Age societies will be avoided altogether as potentially misleading.

In its stead several narrower terms (might) prove more useful. The usage of the word "rank" throughout this book is inspired by Morton Fried's definition: a limitation, recognised by community members, on admission to valued social positions, 'so that not all those of sufficient talent to occupy such statuses actually achieve them'.[141] As a technical term, "social rank" seems to at least partially overlap with the Weberian concept of *der Stand* ("estate", or "order"),[142] or the 'economic, social and juridical "status group"'.[143] The latter collocation will be used for the most part synonymously with "rank". Unlike traditional Marxist classes, status groups are built around not dichotomies but the perceived

136 Mann 2012, pp. 24–25; Rigby 2006, p. 2. Other works of the last-cited authorship touch extensively on the problem of medieval social stratification.

137 Crone 1989, p. 102.

138 Bottomore 1976, p. 3.

139 Crouch 2011, pp. 37–38. On Old Norse material, a similar contrast between modern 'instinctive' views of society as made of 'classes or social groups' and medieval 'instinctive' perceptions of the same societies as networks of individuals has been pointed out by Bagge 2002, p. 184. Crouch's own use of "class" approaches what here would have been called "social stratum" and simultaneously "social group" ('self-conscious and recognised status levels', at p. 37). He further argues that such levels in England appeared only by 1300 AD. *Cf.* above, n. 126, and observations by British historians Chris Wickham and Susan Reynolds (1929–2021) of a late crystallisation of notions and lexemes surrounding nobility (below, nn. 152 and 157).

140 Difficulty in applying of the concept of "social class" to even (high) medieval societies was postulated by, for example, the American scholar of medieval English literature Durant Robertson (1914–1992) (see references in Rigby 2006, p. 4). Conversely, the Dutch medievalist Johanna van Winter, challenging the Russo-French sociologist and jurist Georges Gurvitch's (1894–1965) elaborate definition of "social class", found it for the most part applicable to (predominantly) the Low Countries' knightly aristocracy of the 13th–15th centuries but not to, for instance, 'the knights of eleventh-century France and twelfth-century Germany' (van Winter 1978) – *cf.* David Crouch's similar opinion on English aristocracy above (n. 139). A good exposition of the problems surrounding the term "class", which seem to give rise to such discrepancies, can be found in Bottomore 1976, pp. 1–12.

141 Fried 1967, p. 67.

142 Mitterauer 1977, p. 19.

143 Davenport 2019, p. 8.

relative value of members. In her 'rough-and-ready guide' Patricia Crone asserts in this connexion that,

> [...] the status groups of preindustrial society tended to be just as sharply differentiated in terms of wealth as they were in terms of power and prestige. But they owed their wealth to their position in the hierarchy, not the other way round, or that at least was the principle.[144]

Respective membership can be assigned, if a social status is ascribed (i.e. based on individuals' traits outside their control, e.g., birth), or acquired, if a social status is achieved (i.e. based on individuals' efforts and choices, e.g., occupation).[145] Both can become one's master status, should it dominate all others and translate to one's internalised identity.[146] "Status group" aptly complements both a "social category", made of a number of people united by certain socially relevant features, and a "social group", characterised by an awareness of communality by its members.[147] Introducing the latter term is important, as it allows us to get closer to contemporaries' own self-reflection and social perceptions.[148] These, as noted by Crone, often include notions of hierarchies and stratifications well-reflected in occurrences in sources of comparative adjectives – "better", "more prominent", "more honourable", etc. In this case one can also speak of status groups as variation of subjectively understood "social strata".[149]

1.6.2.2 nobility *vs* aristocracy

The last terminological clarification comes from Timothy Reuter. He argued for the need to analytically divorce "nobility" (< LAT. *nobilitas*, lit. renown, hence high birth) from "aristocracy" (< GR. ἀριστοκρατίᾱ, lit. rule of the best), terms often conflated in every-day parlance (Figure 1):

> A noble is, strictly speaking, a person whose (normally privileged) status is legally defined, which means that one can be a noble without exercising power. An aristocrat, by contrast, is someone who exercises power as a result of being well-born in a socially rather than legally defined sense: this implies the inheritance of wealth, power and social (but not legal) status, and it does not preclude some degree of social mobility.[150]

The conflation is easy to comprehend in light of the frequent practical concurrency of the two phenomena, because, as remarked by the Norwegian-American pioneer of sociology Thorstein Veblen (1857–1923), 'gentle [= noble] blood is blood which has been ennobled by protracted contact with accumulated wealth or unbroken prerogative'.[151] For the early Middle Ages, this statement holds particularly true, because the cited principle formu-

144 Crone 1989, p. 102.
145 Foladare 1969, pp. 53–61.
146 van den Scott and van den Hoonard 2017.
147 Mitterauer 1977, pp. 14–16.
148 On their importance, see Rigby 2006, pp. 5–6, and Coss 2003, p. 29.
149 Mitterauer 1977, p. 17.
150 Reuter 1997, p. 167, – but cf. Susan Reynold's reservations below (n. 152). Note how this terminological ambiguity has led to markedly different interpretations of certain medieval lexemes (LAT. *nobiles*, *nobilissimi*, *primores natu*, *illustrissimi*, *proceres*, *principes regni*) in the German and French historiographical traditions (Bougard, Bührer-Thierry, and Le Jan 2013, p. 736). In context of Nordic history, for instance, Steinar Imsen argues that nobility as a socio-juridical concept is alien to Old Norse (medieval) legislation, and so he narrows his application of "nobility" only to members of the royal Norwegian *hirð* (Imsen 2000b). Differentiation between nobility and aristocracy when describing *thegns* has been proposed by, e.g., Coss 2003, p. 29 (with references to wider research, nn. 45–48), and Williams 2008, p. x.
151 Veblen 1899, p. 52, probably rephrasing a saying, "Nobility is nothing but ancient riches, and money is

lated by Patricia Crone often yielded to how, as claimed by Susan Reynolds, privileges proceeded from wealth and life-style more than from legal definitions.[152] Similarly, Sverre Bagge prioritises social and economic definitions of aristocracy over formal. He counts as aristocrats all those not immediate economic producers who can all the same maintain their elevated lifestyle, in agriculture-based medieval social practice normally by renting out farmlands.[153]

Reuter's analytical separation of "nobility" and "aristocracy" allows their unimpeded use alongside other suggested and equally analytical terms. All things considered, "nobility" in a terminological, analytical sense can be understood as a "legal rank" members of which normally understand themselves as a socially entitled and prestigious hereditary social group.[154] Reuter's explanation of "aristocracy" largely overlaps with the definition of an elite above, though Wickham points out that the last-named is still wider, because elites may include non-aristocratic members too.[155] In his earlier research he further provided a nomenclature of definitive criteria for an early medieval aristocratic stratum which are otherwise overlapping with elite markers, but he still narrows his inclusion down to 'member[s] of (normally landed) political elite' only.[156]

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The proposed terminological precision is not at all the actual linguistic usage of medieval sources, and even less so those from antiquity when some of these terms were coined. Medieval writers, as Chris Wickham notes, in practice lacked a 'word before 1200 or so which accurately translates the words "aristocrat" or "élite", which are our words, not theirs'.[157] But, to quote the British Anglo-Saxonist Sarah Foot,

> [...] modern conceptual vocabularies can helpfully illuminate earlier societies and reveal aspects of their structures of power that would remain opaque were we to limit ourselves to the language within which contemporaries could have articulated their own ideas.[158]

In this sense, application of technical lexicon, such as "rank", "status group", "elite", etc., to *thegns* as a putative historical ontology[159] allows to treat them as of a special case of a

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the world's idol" (reliably recorded by John Ray in 1670 but also ascribed to William Cecil [1520–1598], 1st Baron Burleigh).

152 Reynolds 1997, p. 223. Note further the author's comment in passing (same page) and in the sprit of the French medievalist Marc Bloch (1886–1944) to the effect that 'particularly before the thirteenth century' nobility (and the word "noble", accordingly) was a 'vague and variable concept' that did not universally translate to social status. Contrarily, the object of study in Crick 2009 is evidently what this book suggests calling "social elite", people of recognised (sometimes by law) high social standing, and she variously describes them "elite", "nobility", "aristocracy".

153 Bagge 2010, pp. 120–121.

154 Schmid 1978, pp. 48–49; Wickham 2016, pp. 197–198.

155 Wickham 2011, p. 8; 2016, pp. 197–198. Elite's wideness compared to aristocracy is also emphasised by Poulsen, Vogt, and Sigurðsson 2019, p. 2.

156 Wickham 2005, pp. 153–154. *Cf.* Rollason 2018, who throughout his book occasionally uses the expression 'aristocratic elites' (esp. at pp. 183–186), at least partially in Moscian sense 'the politically important people' (at p. 183).

157 Wickham 2016, p. 197; the word that he refers to is "noble".

158 Foot 2005, p. 127. A similar idea had been expressed by Koselleck 1989, p. 320.

159 Though not coined by him, this expression is today perhaps most firmly tied with the name of the Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking (1936–2023). Without going too far into 'that branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature or essence of being or existence' (the definition of "ontology" by the Oxford English Dictionary) and its cobwebs, for this study's intents and purposes the term "historical ontology" appears most useful when Hacking speaks of a "looping effect", i.e. humans' ability to mutate in response to description (Hacking 1996). Once labelled *X* and internalised this new designation, an individual

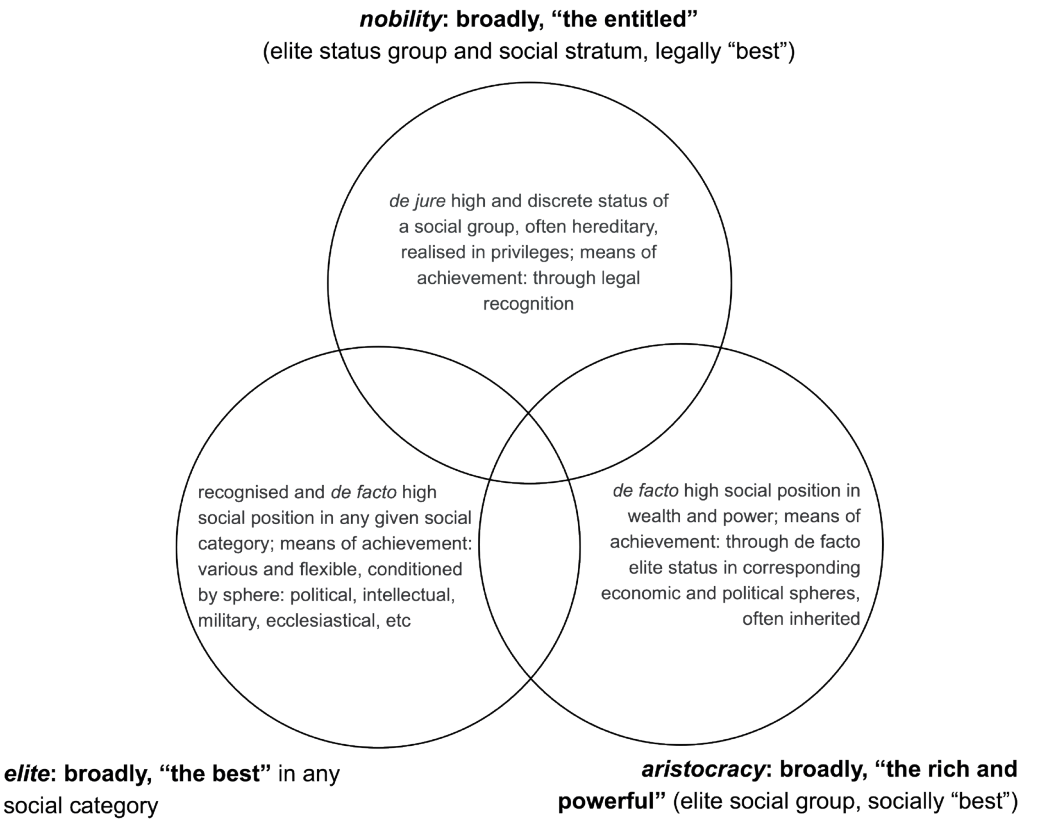

nobility: broadly, "the entitled"
(elite status group and social stratum, legally "best")
de jure high and discrete status of a social group, often hereditary, realised in privileges; means of achievement: through legal recognition
recognised and *de facto* high social position in any given social category; means of achievement: various and flexible, conditioned by sphere: political, intellectual, military, ecclesiastical, etc
de facto high social position in wealth and power; means of achievement: through de facto elite status in corresponding economic and political spheres, often inherited
elite: broadly, "the best" in any social category
aristocracy: broadly, "the rich and powerful" (elite social group, socially "best")

Figure 1. Conceptual map of terminology of types of social recognition and status: a Venn diagram

wider social universal. Studying them thus relates to a broader socio-historical whole and makes possible to translate the results to wider research.

1.7 Methodology and Structure of the Book

1.7.1 Three Stages of Research: From the Semasiological to the Social, Triangulating the Missing Social

Upon laying out in Chapter 1 the plan of the study and proposed methods and premises to it, Chapter 2 will provide an overview of previous research and the state of the scholarship on *thegns* by the beginning of the 21st century. It will lay out some of the main topics that became associated with *thegns* in the past, as well as expound on their source base, with the most important texts provided in full in Appendices 1–2. These explorations will offer robust evidence to underpin the re-assessment of *thegns* as a socio-historical object of study, and will also establish a convincing foundation for this re-evaluation in the summarising sections of Chapter 2. Chapters 3–4 will, accordingly, perform the said socio-historical

becomes an *X*, which in turn informs the initial applicant and causes a positive feedback effect for the next round of labelling, and so forth. In this sense, we can speak of *thegns* as a historical ontology once the word and concept *þegn* leaves the realm of Old English and Old Norse literature and enjoys application in the actual social sphere. More on Hacking's treatment of historical ontology, see his Hacking 2002 (esp. relevant are chaps 1 and 6). I owe familiarisation with Hacking's theory to Wojtek Jezierski.

study. Excursuses 1–2 will overview two particular problems in the studies of *thegns* that are of relevance and have appeared in previous approaches, but of secondary importance to the objectives of this research. Excursus 1 shall summarise the etymology of OE/ON *þegn* and problematise it in view of a recently proposed revision. Excursus 2 addresses the postulated martial context of the Glavendrup rune stone and its titulary that frequently figured in runological examinations of *thegns*.

In light of the scholarly dissonance alluded to above, at the *first stage* of research it is appropriate to initially sidestep the current (implied) definition(s) of OE and ON *þegn*. Instead, the first stage will inductively search for the lexeme's nuanced meanings as actually found in extant sources, before looking at people so called as actual social individuals recorded in sources. This exercise aims at answering the lexicographical research Question 1 and will be performed in §§3.3 and 4.3. In their highly influential *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), Charles Ogden (1889–1957) and Ivor Richards (1893–1979) formulated the famous semiotic triangle, concisely adapted for historical research by, among others, the German legal historian Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand (1926–2014).[160] Historical 'continuances, qualities, occurrences, relationships of reality' ("referent" Ogden and Richards's original scheme), she emphasised, do not stand in immediate relation to words (Ogden and Richards's "symbols") but are bound to them only through concepts (Ogden and Richards's "thought or reference"), communicated through these words/symbols. An investigation that seeks to bring a historical ontology(-ies) behind a word into focus should thus be of semasiological nature. Semasiology is a method of critical review of the contexts of the lexeme's occurrence in the sources in order to establish the social phenomena that the studied lexeme signifies. Unavoidably and as alluded to in the semiotic triangle, this stage overlaps with studies in linguistics and historical semantics, both of which have been applied to the study of *thegns* and beyond,[161] as well in the history of concepts (GER. *Begriffsgeschichte*). However, one of the pioneers of the latter discipline, the German historian and theorist Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006) aptly claimed that,

> *Begriffsgeschichte* is not an end in itself, even if it follows its own method. Insofar as it delivers indices and components for social history, *Begriffsgeschichte* can be defined as a methodologically independent part of sociohistorical research.[162]

Put bluntly, concentration on conceptual and linguistic details of the word *þegn* in this book will be done only inasmuch as it furthers the study set along a socio-historical line of research first and foremost. It aims to explore not so much the history of the word *þegn*, but rather the word *þegn* in history and to provide a social anchoring for a history of an idea. To quote Koselleck once more,

> [...] persistence, change, or novelty in the meaning of words must first be grasped before they can be used as indices of this extralinguistic content, as indicators of social structures or situations of political conflict.[163]

160 Schmidt-Wiegand 1975, pp. 52–53.
161 Loyn 1955; Green 1965 (esp. pp. 98–106); Roberts 2000; Jesch 2001; Carlton 2019, pp. 107–127, to name only a few. A prime example of the linguistic approach to early medieval social categories is, perhaps, von Olberg 1991, and many other works by the same author. A good illustration of application of historical semantics to (early) medieval Nordic studies is Johansson 2010.
162 Koselleck 2004, p. 89.
163 Koselleck 2004, p. 83.

Having mapped the senses embedded in the word *þegn*, the *second stage* in §§3.4 and 4.4 shall narrow down the source selection to only those that have a bearing on the actual Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian social circumstances. The task is to examine how an idea, as much as it can be grasped in the language of primary sources, realised itself in the sphere of the social. *Prima facie*, this objective would have us draw social portraits of as many *thegns* as possible. But such an undertaking would approximate this study to, in a nutshell, a list of extended/compressed biographies. Though such approach has been successfully utilised before,[164] it will largely be sidestepped in favour of finding trends and patterns common to whole social categories as defined above. The result will thus address the socio-historical research Question 2 with the aim of an external, "structural" description of the said categories and attention to the dynamics in their standing in broader societal structures. In its Scandinavian extent, however, it will have to follow a methodologically motivated and strictly controlled onomasiological approach (i.e. the study of how a phenomenon becomes reflected in a language). In other words, due to the condition and nature of the source base, §4.4.3.1 will propose formal and substantiated lexical and social criteria of *thegnship* that will allow a deductive elucidation a variously named social phenomenon.[165]

However enticing it appears at first glance, a direct collation of the conclusions in Chapters 3–4 is only mediately relevant to runic *thegns*. Old Norse Viking-Age skaldic poetry catered to a rather narrow societal sphere, most pertinent predominantly to a chieftainly (later kingly) hall – and this fact was likely perceived by contemporaries. And in prose, with only few rare exceptions, ON *þegn* is present only in medieval Old Norse–Icelandic written sources, removed in time and space from both Anglo-Saxon England and the Southern Scandinavian areal of runic commemorative tradition. Historically non-simultaneous and illuminated by sources too far apart, the objects would not be like-for-like in a head-on lineal comparison. Instead, a historical triangulation of sorts appears viable. The Anglo-Saxon "vertex" in this triangle, explored in Chapter 3, can serve as a chronologically synchronous checkpoint, but is itself of insufficient explanatory force and requiring allowances, as maintained by the "Nielsenists". The Old Norse "vertex" in Chapter 4 is asynchronous with the raising of the Danish and Swedish *thegnly* rune stones, which shortcoming the "Aakjærians" sought to compensate by looking across the North Sea, and consists largely of Old Norwegian and Icelandic literary specimens. Yet it is linguistically and culturally unmediated and can thus serve as a checkpoint endowed with the benefit of an *a priori* greater historical continuity. Together the two "vertices" should balance each other. Therefore, the third and *final stage*, that shall occupy all of §4.5.3, shall attempt not a definitive answer of who a Viking-Age Danish or Swedish *thegn* immortalised in a runic

164 To give but a few examples from the Anglo-Saxon precedent: Hart 1973; Henson 2001; Baxter 2007, pp. 217–219, 240–257, 261–266; Williams 2008, chaps 1–3, alongside many other works by last-cited author (see the list by Roffe 2012, pp. 257–261); Bolton 2009, pp. 15–3, 51–60, 65–68; Lloyd 2014.

165 Long before the methodological article by Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand (above, n. 160), onomasiology was successfully recurred to by Helle 1972, pp. 17–22, whose main argument was a great lexical synonymity and overlap in practical behaviour of the variously referred to social actors he studied (my gratitude belongs to Lars Hermanson for drawing my attention to this book). A more recent inspiring specimen of the onomasiological approach on a similar premise is Brink 2021. A *sui generis* amalgam the two methods was undertaken by Reynolds 1994. She, on the one hand, rejected the modern scholarly use of words "vassalage" and "fief" as anachronistic (hence, semasiology – esp. at p. 34) but, on the other, also set out to review the actual social and legal conditions of (landed) property that the said use had conventionally been intended to describe (hence, onomasiology). Reynolds's approach stimulated further research, e.g., by Górecki 2000 (esp. p. 118).

epitaph provenly were, but rather an approximation that fits and relates to both "vertices" and answers who they could have been. It should thus link to the cross-disciplinary Question 3 tackled at the end of Chapter 5, namely what a possible explanation of the relation between the two "vertices" can add to the actively explored Anglo–Scandinavian contacts during the Viking Age.

An important refinement of the suggested research strategy calls for itself, though. As is apparent from the introduction above, two sets of sources cause a lot of doubt and, in and of themselves, particularly necessitate the current study – Wulfstan's writings and rune stones. For this reason, they will be avoided in the initial stages of the linguistic and historical inquiries and re-integrated at conclusions to Chapters 3–4, accordingly. In doing so, methodological support comes, for example, the German medievalist and specialist in historical semantics Bernhard Jussen who did exactly that when posing a question of the concepts of gifts with medieval authors. He removed the most inviting source as insufficiently elucidating, brought together various other texts from across his period, and applied the arrived at contextualisation to the suggested definition.[166] What is proposed is to turn to less loaded sources, using context analysis to outline definitions and to trace the changes these definitions may have undergone in relation to regional peculiarities and chronological evolution.[167] Should the results more or less match Wulfstan's formula, proving its validity, the archbishop's description can be integrated into the case, though every unique detail therein should still be corroborated with broader material. As relates the rune stones, the method is largely the same, only here, at the end of the day, one is to collate the runic material with not only later Old Norse but also contemporaneous Old English senses.

1.7.2 Approaches and Method

In conformity with the stages on the preceding section, the three methodological cornerstones this study rests upon are:

1. Context analysis, i.e. examination of the environment an object of study belongs to, applied to the potentially fullest corpora of the two languages.
2. A discriminant approach, chronological analysis, particular attention to inner features.
3. Approaching historical ontologies behind fleshed-out linguistic concept(s).

Elements of this triad have found multiple applications in previous research in one way or the other. For instance, context analysis was used by the American philologist John Lindow in his lexicographical study of the *comitatus* Germanic vocabulary.[168] An example of an approach through corpus linguistics on the basis of the *Thesaurus of Old English*, a massive project hosted by King's College London and the University of Glasgow, is observable in

166 Jussen 2003.

167 The use of this method and its offshoots in the present study is hardly revolutionary, as it has won favour among many historians. For instance, the Swedish medievalist Curt Weibull (1886–1991) in his 1921 essay on the study of Saxo Grammarian's works insisted that events of the Danish 12th-century political history be reconstructed off contemporary documentary evidence, and Saxo's troubled narrative be applied later (Torstendahl 1981, p. 126). More recently, to name only one example, Shchavelev 2020 in his reconstruction of the earliest historical lineage and subjected territory of the Rurikid dynasty in the 10th century put aside the single extant native annalistic source for his period, the so-called *Primary Chronicle*, compiled only shortly before 1120 AD, as it dates events retrospectively, and instead called upon synchronous foreign evidence – Byzantine, Latin, Jewish-Khazar, and Arabic.

168 Lindow 1976, pp. 106–111.

an article by Jane Roberts.[169] Both methods served essential research tools in the German historian Tim Geelhaar's historical-semantical study of the word and concept *Christianitas* in the early Middle Ages.[170] Petr Stefanovich used broadly similar methodology in his re-assessment of the Old Russian *comitatus* (ORUS. *družina*), in which he meticulously went through available source evidence, organised by chronology, region, and genre.[171]

The advancement proposed here lies in bringing these methods together in one investigation. Combining these techniques is aimed at a multidimensional presentation: we will probably be able to follow the evolution both of a lexical unit with the concept behind it and actual historical ontology(-ies) associated with them, thus abandoning the "synthetic" picture.

1.7.2.1 context analysis and corpora methods

For a study such as proposed below, methods of corpus linguistics can come in handy at the *first stage*. This approach developed in the late 1960s and has since then greatly progressed due to advances in computer software and mass digitalisation. The underlying premise of this field is that large-scale analysis of a given language's collected corpus should (at least ideally) minimise a researcher's bias or interference. In connexion with the two languages under scrutiny, a great leap forward was made since the end of the 20th century: devoted teams of linguists and philologists have compiled such corpora for both Old English and Old Norse that have now been digitised and made accessible to public:

- *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE for short) is an on-going project, first conceived back in 1968 and developed by the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. As of 2022, the entries for letters A–I were finished (letters A–G are available on microfiche, A–H on CD-ROM, letter I at present online only). En route in 2009, the team released the DOE Web Corpus which is a database of 'at least one copy of every surviving Old English text'; 'as such, the DOE Web Corpus represents over three million words of Old English and fewer than a million words of Latin'.[172]
- *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* (DAN. *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, ONP for short) is a similar enterprise started by the Arnamagnæan Commission in 1939 and taken over by the Department of Scandinavian Research at the University of Copenhagen in 2010. Unfortunately, unlike DOE, ONP does not aspire to exhaustiveness. According to some estimations and depending on the upper chronological limit, the Old Norse corpus could be as large as some 11 million words, of which 800 thousand appear in ONP as citations, and together with the context in provided examples, ONP includes between 4 and 5 million.[173] Nevertheless, ONP's data

169 Roberts 2000.

170 Geelhaar 2015 (for research methodology, see esp. chap 1). A cursory summary in English can be found in Gellhaar, Kuchenbuch, Perreaux et al. 2023, pp. 37–40. The same article is also a succinct overview of the potential and hurdles of the traditional *Begriffsgeschichte*. The highly thought-provoking article reached me when my research had virtually been completed, but upon collating it became apparent that many of the utilised principles converged with those proposed by the authors. My gratitude for alerting me to this work belongs to Wojtek Jezierski.

171 Stefanovich 2012.

172 Wilcox 2005, p. 53 (n. 3) gives a higher number and estimates the corpus at ca. 3.9 million words.

173 These assessments have been kindly shared with me in private correspondence (29 April 2021) by Tarrin Willis, one of the editors of ONP.

can be supplemented by other corpora. In particular, by the time this study was produced, at least three Old Norse corpora joined the European linguistic project *Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure* (CLARIN) since its inception back in 2012:

- *The Medieval Nordic Text Archive* (Menota), founded in 2001 and designed at the Univesity of Bergen; contains about 1.8 million words from 'almost 50 Medieval Nordic texts';
- *The Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus* (IcePaHC), designed and compiled by a group of British and Icelandic scholars in 2011; contains little over 1 million words from the 12th to the 21st centuries;
- *The Saga Corpus* (*Fornritin*), developed by The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in 2018; contains about 1.5 million words from 41 Old Icelandic narrative texts.

- *The Skaldic Project Database* (*SkP* for short), began in 1997 and developed by Tarrin Wills and Hannah Burrows at the University of Aberdeen, is an electronic database of all known (and currently edited) skaldic poetry that began as a digital workspace for editors of the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* publication series (2008–present).[174]
- *The Scandinavian Runic Text Database* (SW. *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, SRTB for short) was assembled in 1993–1997 by Lennart Elmevik, Lena Peterson, Henrik Williams and colleagues at the Department of Scandinavian Languages of Uppsala University. It began as a Swedish-only dataset that after 1989 expanded to include all Viking-Age Old Norse runic monuments. Further development led to that since December 2020, in collaboration with Uppsala University the Swedish National Heritage Board (SW. *Riksantikvarieämbetet*) has been hosting an online search interface for the database, Runor.[175] SRTB operates on open licence and in 2013–2016, Dr Sofia Pereswetoff-Morath and Vadim Frolov developed a web client, Rundata–net, intended for modern machines. In most respects, the two databases replicate each other. But Rundata–net surpasses Runor in search features, for it provides more options and allows exporting the output in a tabled format. All subsequent references to runological material in the book will be to these databases and their inherited from SRTB sigla will be adapted throughout.

These databases enable research to reach qualitatively new level by significantly widening the range of Old English and Old Norse sources to contain OE/ON *þegn*. This allows an in-depth search and providing a very inclusive catalogue of mentions of the studied word throughout the respective corpora.

1.7.2.2 discriminant approach and attention to chronology

Naturally, with the volume of the assortment in the corpora, it would be unthinkable to treat all entries in these databases equally, as it will turn this study into merely a lexico-

174 On this corpus, see further Wills 2015; 2019.

175 The history and details on the SRTB are chartered by Williams, Bianchi, and Zimmermann 2021, pp. 117–124. See also other articles in the same volume on other editions and databases for runological research.

graphical catalogue. Instead, Chapters 3–4 will offer a taxonomy of discerned meanings and supply some of the most telling and relevant cases from the sources. In building this taxonomy this study has made use, however briefly, of all registered entries.

Latin texts pose something of a methodological dilemma. On the one hand, they are indeed abundant, and they frequently belonged to and were produced in similar or even the same social environments. On the other hand, they resist the corpus approach presented above owing to their lexical variance. Though we can be relatively positive that the normal rendition of LAT. *minister* was OE *þegn*,[176] the opposite is not universally the case. Latin translations from Old English show a great deal of instability, rendering *thegn* as *tainus*, *minister*, *optimas*, *proceres*, *nobilis*, *comes*, and so forth.[177] Word choice might vary even within one individual text. For example, where other manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* unanimously mention *thegns*, manuscript F (*c.* 1100 AD) has *quidam perdives* for *an þegen* in *s.a.* 465 AD, *nobiliores* for *godan ðegenas s.a.* 1010 AD and *primi Occidentalium Saxonum* for *ealle ða westernan ðegenas s.a.* 1013 AD. If we were to take all such renditions as a governing principle, it would make the whole research unmanageable. Overall, Latin sources will in this study be assessed with due caution and discretion.

Of paramount importance is relating our sources to a timeline. The methodological danger lies in a tempting prospect of retrospective projection of the later evidence to a more distant past, which at all times requires meticulous argumentation to avoid anachronisms. Closely linked to the chronology of the sources is the problem of their provenance, genre, and circulation. Not only a careful examination of each source's credibility is needed, but also, for example, considerations of the linguistic conventions and milieu – this is especially apparent in literary text. Last but not least, local peculiarities need to be observed: neither England nor Scandinavia were anything like socially or culturally unified entities.

1.7.2.3 approaching historical ontologies behind linguistic concepts

After the conceptual framework for OE and ON *þegn* and its evolution has been elucidated, at the *second stage* the study will turn to possible social historical ontologies covered by this word. In England, this venture has a firmer ground. Here, historians possess two invaluable documentary sources – Anglo-Saxon charters, whose function was that of a land title, and a kingdom-wide land survey of *Domesday Book* – augmented by contemporary royal legislation, inasmuch as it purports to represent the supposedly "normal" state of social affairs.

For Scandinavia, sadly, laws are our only source for a tangible *thegnly* social ontology, as in Nordic charters *thegns* never figure as social individuals proper. Moreover, Scandinavian *Provincial Laws* rarely treat *thegns* as such social individuals either. Yet even thus they allow some insight into how the concept of a *thegn* could have been applied in social practice at the moment of record or shortly before. Beside laws, auxiliary sources include sagas and other prose and skaldic verse. The prose provides concrete instances of social interaction that involved *thegns*, fully in line with to what it amounts in legislation. So does the skaldic poetry, but most importantly it connects *thegns* with possession of land, one of the research sub-questions within Question 2 for this study that otherwise has no connexion point to the sources at hand. These considerations shall serve an important point in the triangulation

176 A case made by Loyn 1955 and since then still not refuted.

177 See, for instance, Thacker 1981. In post-Conquest Latin, the instability is just as pronounced (Sharpe 2017).

process at the *third stage* suggested above, as it will serve a *sui generis* benchmark for much earlier runic *thegns*.

Chapter 2
Previous Research on *Thegns*

2.1 Introduction

No historical research springs from a barren historiographical soil. *Thegns* have been blessed with scholarly attention. However, the first part of chapter below shows that, save an isolated article by Henry Loyn (1922–2000), (socio-)linguistic issues surrounding the meanings of OE *þegn* and broached in research Question 1 yielded to the considerable interest in Anglo-Saxon *thegns*' socio-historical aspects (such as elite legal status confluent with landed proprietorship and/or royal service), capped by research Question 2. The second part further shows that it was, before anything else, matters of trans-North-Sea connections and pertaining to research Question 3 that have driven a parallel Nordic research.

This chapter aims at two mutually connected goals. First will be presented a condensed historiographical introduction into how *thegns* used to be studied and presented in scholarship, briefly introduced above. Then will follow an evaluation of some of the crucial evidence utilised in the examined scholarship. These exercises will serve to substantiate and further motivate rethinking *thegns* in the light of the proposed and just recapped research questions, the objective pursued in Chapters 3–4.

Naturally, it is unfathomable to cover all relevant monographs, book chapters, and articles. For the sake of brevity only the most exemplary or influential contributions that received subjectively wider circulation or, conversely, treated the object of study in a less conventional way shall be mentioned below. Paralleling the actual developments of discussions, the historiographical sketch will trace the study of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian *thegns* as two self-sufficient objects of research in existing literature.

2.2 Anglo-Saxon *Thegn*

By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, an Anglo-Saxon *thegn* had become what above was called a "reference model" and, crudely put, common knowledge in no need of detailed definition. This state of the art is well-reflected in progressively fewer works that mention *thegns* and at the same time elaborate (leastwise on a side-note) what or who an Anglo-Saxon *thegn* was. The closest that readers will frequently find are broad descriptions such as, for example:

> Thegns were in origin servants [...] and the official character of their position was still clear in the eleventh century. But the practice of rewarding them with land had gone far by this time to convert them into a local aristocracy with an almost hereditary rank. [...] Among the thegns, at one end of the scale, were men who possessed estates in many shires acquired through generations of royal service, and, at the other, were men indistinguishable from land-holding freemen except by their rank. Nor did they form an exclusive circle.[178]

178 Barlow 1999, p. 5. *Cf.* Gautier 2008, p. 355, who downplays the role of service and smoothens it to a "pure mark of status" used to "designate members of nobility" (*une pure marque de statut, sans réelle référence à un quelconque service, et désigne donc des membres de la noblesse*).

The inclusivity of *thegnship* is commonly explained as a consequence of the attainability of the legal *thegnly* rank by lower social strata upon fulfilling certain necessary requirements, for instance:

> By the first half of the eleventh century, a freeman had the outward and visible signs of thegnly rank once he had acquired 'five hides of land of his own, a church and a kitchen, a bell-house and a fortress-gate, a seat and special office in the king's hall'.[179]

There rarely, if ever, follow discussions of who enforced these criteria and in what manner,[180] how, when, and why these criteria originated in the first place, and whether they were subject to chronological and geographical fluctuations.[181] As will be showcased shortly, this picture, drawn with an admittedly wide brush, relies on a very limited number of first-hand and, as we now know, authorial sources. But first, this study will benefit from a brief recapitulation of how these sources have been used before and how Anglo-Saxon *thegns* reached the postulated status of a common wisdom.

2.2.1 Historiography

Pointing out an exact ground zero in studies of Anglo-Saxon *thegns* is a challenging task. Ever since the "discovery" of Anglo-Saxon England during the Tudor period,[182] *thegns* appeared here and there in literature, without attracting too much attention.[183] As outlined by John Niles, while Old English studies were still in their infancy Latin remained a readily available intermediary language. LAT. *minister* – the most common rendition of OE *þegn* – hardly stirs up a classically educated polymath's imagination.

2.2.1.1 19th century: Constitutional and legal history

The first time *thegns* seem to have captured a historian's attention beyond just as an antiquated curiosity (as in Shakespeare's Scottish thanes) was in the writings of Sharon Turner (1768–1847). 'Beneath the cyning [i.e. king] and his family', Turner conceived of the Anglo-Saxon society as divided in four uneven strata – the nobility, the free, the freedmen, and the slaves, – and identified *thegns* as a 'social class' within the top one of them. These strata, just as in 'our own superior civilisation', were composed of individuals of uneven standing, and this social inequality stemmed from inequality in birth, wealth, landed property, and office. Turner envisaged social mobility between these 'classes' as hinging upon landed proprietorship:

> […] though property might confer distinction, yet it was the possession of landed property which raised a man [*sic*] to those titles which might be called ennobling.

Nuancing this statement, Turner retold the source today known as *Geþyncðu*: any *ceorl* attained the position of a *thegn* by acquiring

179 Blair 2006, p. 371.
180 A welcoming exception are the remarks by Hudson 2012, p. 205, and Christine Senecal's insistence on peer confirmation.
181 Arguably, Henry Chadwick (and, later, his arguments were developed by Alan Thacker) discussed it at the longest (below, p. 43) – *cf.* merely one condensed note by his American counterpart Laurence M. Larson (1904, p. 99 [n. 1]).
182 Niles 2015a, pp. 49–76.
183 E.g., Lambarde 1576, pp. 502–505; Blount 1670, p. 287 (*s.v.* "thane"); Brady 1685, p. 80; Shelton 1718, pp. 126–129.

> […] five hides of his own land, a church, a kitchen, a bell-house, a burghate-seat [*sic*],[184] and an appropriate office in the king's hall,

– and the same held true for a 'merchant, who went three times over sea with his own craft'. In passing, Turner further equated the *ceorl* with OE *twihynde* (*mann*) (lit. two-hundreder, i.e. whose *wergild* is 200 shillings) and the *thegn* with OE *twelfhynde* (*mann*) (lit. twelve-hundreder, i.e. whose *wergild* is 1,200 shillings). Though the procedure was not elaborated, Turner asserted that a *thegn* could also 'arrive at the dignity of an eorl'. *Eorl* and *thegn*, 'when he was a king's thegn', were 'species of nobility which was gained by official dignities' beside the *ealdorman*, *heretoch* (*sic*), *gerefa*, and *scir-reve* (i.e. sheriff). As such they possessed 'political rank and immunities', and their families enjoyed some 'beneficial distinction'. Turner also distinguished between kings' *thegns*, whom he recognised among witnesses in royal diplomas, the *ministri*, and later called barons, and much more numerous 'inferior thegns [...] after the Conqueror's time termed knights'.[185]

Turner's description and the scope of involved sources has in essence one or another way inspired nearly all later English-speaking research concerning the Anglo-Saxon *thegns*. In the following, many passages that offer close retellings of Turner's ideas will be skipped. Instead, focus will move to the points of divergence.

Influenced and converted to romantic Germanism by the Grimm brothers, John Kemble (1807–1857) paid a close attention to the "Teutonic" *comitatus* on the English soil. To his philological mind, OE *þegn* was just another name for a member of a princely *comitatus* on a par with LAT. *comes* and OE *gesīð*, a person ennobled through service. Unlike Turner, Kemble identified the two 'personal ranks' of *twi-* and *twelfhunde* not as property classes, but as legal categories based on 200- and 1,200-shilling *wergilds,* respectively.[186] A more reserved than Kemble, the Germanist Bishop William Stubbs (1825–1901) virtually embodied that strand of Victorian historiography to which his three-volume *Constitutional History of England* (1874–1878) lent a name. In a nutshell, the red thread that ran through his *opus magnum* was a narrative of uninterrupted historical progress and synergy of "democratic" "Teutonic" communal institutions and a strong government introduced by the Normans, with a culmination in the emergence of Parliament in the 13th century.[187] In the Anglo-Saxon society, that foundation for the later 'great homogeneous people, symmetrically organised and united, progressive and thoroughly patriotic', Stubbs envisaged the role of *thegns* as follows. They began as the *gesiths* of the royal *comitatus*, but by about the 930s the group

184 The term (*recte* *burhgate-seat) was left unclarified in the original 1801 text and subsequent revisions. In 1897, William Stevenson renounced the hitherto often-reproduced meaningless OE **burhgeatsetl* (lit. fortress-gate-seat) and introduced the correct word separation in CCCC MS 201: OE *burhgeat* (fortified gate) and *setl* (seat) in a king's hall. On the correct reading, see: Petit-Dutaillis and Lefebvre 1930, chap IV; on *burhgeat* as such, see further: Shapland 2019, p. 146 (n. 73, with references).

185 Turner 1801, pp. 76–83, 222–231. This latter derivation of English medieval barons from Anglo-Saxon kings' *thegns* was later proponed by Reid 1920 and then by David R. Roffe (1989; later reproduced with revisions in Roffe 2000, pp. 28–46), with an intermediary contribution by, e.g., Vinogradoff 1908, pp. 79–85, and Stenton 1932, chaps 3–4; 1971, pp. 635–637). The two latter saw a continuity between petty *thegns* and knights, and Stenton further fully supported and developed Turner's identification of kings' *thegns* with barons. The reason why Turner, Vinogradoff, and Reid's arguments so resonated with Stenton probably lay in his 'feeling that continuity should always be assumed in history unless evidence overwhelmingly suggested disruption' (Bentley 2006, p. 110).

186 Kemble 1849, I, pp. 162–184. On Kemble's place in Anglo-Saxon studies more generally, see Niles 2015a, pp. 229–242.

187 For more of Stubbs's historiosophy, see a (somewhat apologetic) review by Campbell 2000, pp. 247–268 (originally a 1989 Stenton Lecture and the University of Reading).

split. Some *thegns* absorbed the upper crust of the free population by opening their ranks through the five-*hide* quota, while others consumed the former hereditary aristocracy and became the new "servile" aristocracy, 'bound to service in war, not necessarily by relation to the king, but simply as landowner[s]'. The idea of upward social mobility by virtue of owning five *hides* of land was of prime importance to Stubbs, and he did not fail to briefly mention the *thegn*'s 1,200-shilling *wergild*.[188] Critique of Stubbs came from a short and little noticed paper by Andrew Little (1863–1945) who objected to merging the *gesīðas/comites* and *thegns* into one group. Rather than in *comitatus*, Little surmised the origin of *thegns* in Tacitus's freedmen (LAT. *libertini*) of rulers' extended household and employed for administrative purposes in growing kingdoms. He also objected to the five-*hide* criterion for a *thegnly wergild*, and instead explained a five-*hide* estate as merely an average *thegnly* plot of land.[189] Little's theses never caught on, possibly due to their unconventionality.

Before leaving the 19th century, two further names deserve mentioning. Frederic Maitland's (1850–1906) input is his assertion of both a homogeneous nature of the Domesday *taini* and of 'inconsistent elements' surrounding *thegns*: heredity, personal relationship, military, and proprietary aspects blend, so that

> [...] the man with five hides is entitled to become, perhaps he may be compelled to become a thegn, a warrior.[190]

This latter idea was lifted from Maitland's contemporary, John Round's (1854–1928), monograph, which will be dealt with below in §2.2.2.2.[191] In retrospect, Maitland and Round swapped the cause and effect of the *thegnly* elevated status: from acknowledgement of wealth and social prominence to privilege for fulfilling obligations. Neither really attached great importance to these conclusions, however.

2.2.1.2 20th century: social history

In 1905, Henry Chadwick's (1870–1947) seminal set of essays of Anglo-Saxon social institutions capitalised on and, in a way, crowned the Victorian historiography and simultaneously opened the floor for many specimens of modern research. Chadwick's primary relevant input was an extensive, "scientific" substantiation of the, by then, firmly entrenched idea of a 1,200-shilling *thegnly wergild* as opposed to a *ceorl*'s 200-shilling *wergild*. In order to achieve this goal, Chadwick first began with no less than seventy-five pages on monetary matters, and this

> [...] discussion of the currency was a prelude to the main business, which was using the data in law-codes to shed light on aspects of Anglo-Saxon society.[192]

The reason for such a lengthy detour was that while *ceorl*'s 200-shilling *wergild* can be deduced from multiple references, only one source explicitly mentions a 1,200-shilling *thegnly* manprice. Chadwick backed up this single occurrence with complex arithmetical and logical

188 Stubbs 1891, I, pp. 39, 86, 169–176 *et passim*. Crucially for this discussion, Stubbs's general 'idea of constitutional development [...] as he sometimes presents it suggests that each class of society, so soon as it was fitted for the trust, was admitted to a share of power and control' (Campbell 2000, p. 254).

189 Little 1889.

190 Maitland 1921, p. 164.

191 The two worked in parallel in cognisance of this very fact, of course. Maitland 1921, p. v, acknowledged that he deliberately postponed his publication to improve it with Round's earlier findings.

192 Naismith 2015, p. 146. On Chadwick's wider contributions, see other chapters in the same volume.

assumptions off his in-depth knowledge of vernacular sources. He rejected, however, *thegns* a status of a self-sufficient 'social class', because, he explained, their position hinged on the status of lords to whom *thegns* were commended. This, Chadwick explained, is why, on the one hand, up until the 930s OE *þegn* was invariably paired with the possessive "king's", and on the other hand, why it was through royal service that *thegns* became associated with hereditary high birth and elite, not shut to outsiders, though. Kings' *thegns* formed the top tier and witnessed royal diplomas as royal *ministri*. By further collating Old English and Latin titulary, Chadwick posited that before the end of the 9th century when OE *gesīð* fell out of use for its obsolescence, in Wessex this lexeme signified a more or less independent landowner, while the king's courtiers and officials went under the name of kings' *thegns*. In contrast, in Northumbria the latter made up the immediate royal bodyguards, whereas *gesiths* acted as monarchs' agents and advisors.[193] In the same years on the other side of the Atlantic an American of Norwegian origin, Laurence Larson (1868–1938), in 1902 defended and in 1904 published his Ph.D. thesis on the Anglo-Saxon royal household. Chadwick, to judge from the absence of references, did (perhaps, could) not read it for his own 1905 volume but the conclusions the two historians reached were rather convergent. Due to the nature of his subject, Larson looked at *thegns* first and foremost through the prism of royal *comitatus*, though he too saw them as a wider 'social class'.[194] Similar views were expressed, admittedly without an attempt at systematisation, by Sir Paul Vinogradoff (1854–1925): for him, *thegns* were a hereditary 'military class' defined by a 1,200-shilling *wergild* and service to the king or other lords.[195]

A major landmark that developed Chadwick and Larson's conclusions was a paper by Henry Loyn. He took a narrower linguistic approach and philologically studied Alfredian Latin–Old English translations. Loyn concluded that, in the social sphere,

> [...] as late as the end of the ninth century, a thegn was still, customarily, one who served a lord in a personal capacity. By the time of the Norman Conquest eorls and thegns were the two recognized social divisions between freeman and king.[196]

Before Loyn, Sir Frank Stenton (1880–1963), a towering authority in the mid-20th-century Anglo-Saxon scholarship, formulated a powerful narrative of English pre-Conquest history. In it, the 'Old English state' was of a pronounced aristocratic nature so that lay and clerical elites had a decisive role in the governance on both central and local levels.[197] Besides re-iterating a connexion of post-Conquest feudal gentry to the Domesday *taini* and of Norman barons to Anglo-Saxon royal *ministri* (above, n. 185), Stenton's most important contribution to the problem of the *thegns* was a coherent distinction between the military obligations of *ceorlas* and *thegns*. Picking the baton up from Stubbs, he explained that *thegns* served in the host due to their rank, whereas *ceorlas* reported to the army due to an

193 Chadwick 1905, pp. 76–114, 308–354.
194 Larson 1904, chap 3.
195 Vinogradoff 1908, pp. 79–85, 403–411, 420 *et passim*.
196 Loyn 1955, p. 543.
197 Such view was not revolutionary at the time. In post-war Europe, similar ideas on continental material are sometimes united in a historiographical concept of *Adelsherrschaft* ("dominance of nobility"). In the main, it was developed by the German historian Heinrich Dannenbauer (1897–1961) and later to a lesser or greater degree supported by Otto Brunner (1898–1982), Gerd Tellenbach (1903–1999), and Theodor Mayer (1883–1972). According to this view, the social and political dominance of the German aristocracy was not a new phenomenon but a continuation of the (mythic) "Germanic freedom" of Tacitus's epoch (Stefanovich 2012, p. 58).

alleged old "Germanic" custom.[198] This discrepancy seemed complicatedly superfluous to the American medievalist Charles Hollister (1930–1997) who saw the Anglo-Saxon army organised about a territorial instead of a personal military obligation. For defensive purposes, Hollister argued, every shire would indeed gather all able-bodied freemen. But for offensive campaigns the Cerdicings summoned only an elite mobile force, christened by him 'select fyrd', in which *ceorlas* and *thegns* served shoulder-to-shoulder.[199] According to some, this was a misreading of the sources.[200] Hollister's indifference to *thegns* as such also inadvertently led to a theoretical deadlock. His scheme left unexplained what distinguished a *thegn* from a *ceorl* if both performed military duties out of the same principle, namely that every five *hides* had to send one man, regardless of his status, for the royal host.[201]

The later decades of the century did not witness a discontent with previously inherited wisdoms about Anglo-Saxon *thegns.* Timothy Reuter once explained it as

> [...] due [...] to the survival, indeed dominance, of an orthodoxy within Anglo-Saxon historical studies which retained a highly traditional conception of the relationship between ruler and people long after similar views had been abandoned or substantially modified for other periods and regions,[202]

– and the formulation of these views was blamed by him on Stenton. To be fair, Reuter's assertion that Stenton's "orthodoxy" hampered more recent enquiries into the study of the Anglo-Saxon lay elites may be somewhat of an exaggeration. But the research questions and applied methodology, as well as the range of sources, have remained very stable. For example, Katherine Mack's scrupulous examination of the *ministri* at court between the reigns of Kings Æthelred and Cnut ultimately goes back to Chadwick.[203] Turner's ideas of continuity never truly left the historiographical scene (above, n. 185) and got a fresh vigour from, among others, John Gillingham and Peter Coss.[204] Both argued that the social essence of *thegns* was convergent with the later medieval gentry, and both distinguished top and lower layers among *thegns* defined by their personal service to kings or other lords. Two years after Reuter's article came out, Christine Senecal defended a Ph.D. dissertation with a great many challenges for the "orthodoxy" envisaged by him.[205] In particular, she highlighted the king-oriented nature of the sources on which studies of *thegns* (and, by extension, pre-Conquest aristocracy as a whole) are traditionally built. Henceforth this quality shall be referred to as "monarchocentrism". Senecal insisted on abandoning the *ceorl–thegn* legal dichotomy and drew attention to other definitive features of a high social standing, very resonant with those in the future programme article by Bougard and colleagues.[206] *Pace* Chadwick, Roffe, Gillingham and others, for Senecal, divisive lines among *thegns* did not run through personal commendation and service. These, she argued, described not

198 Stenton 1932, pp. 116–119, 130; 1971, p. 583. Stenton's role in English medieval studies is aptly (somewhat panegyrically) summarised by Bentley 2006, pp. 141–142. Stenton's historiosophy, with an obvious Stubbsian ring to it, was explored by Keynes 1994.
199 Hollister 1962 (esp. pp. 64–65 with an abbreviated version).
200 Most profoundly Hollister's scheme was criticised by Abels 1988.
201 *Cf.* Fleckenstein 1989 (reprint of an original 1975 article).
202 Reuter 1997, p. 182.
203 Mack 1984.
204 Gillingham 1995; Coss 2003, chap 2. Worth noting is that the two authors wrote their works in a constant dialogue and with reference to each other.
205 Senecal 1999, pp. 17–50.
206 Senecal 1999, pp. 16–17.

concrete people but their types of individual obligations. She therefore renounced the view of Anglo-Saxon aristocracy as a hierarchical top-down pyramid and instead posited that a *thegn* was such inasmuch as he partook in an aristocratic culture and was perceived as such by other participants. Her definition of an Anglo-Saxon *thegn* is worth quoting in full:

> [...] an aristocrat in a warrior society, whose wealth was based on land and who carried out important business — sometimes for the king, sometimes for himself, sometimes for his local community.[207]

Despite her many welcome counterpoints to the "reference model", how exactly this aristocracy had formed lay beyond Senecal's focus of interest. Without it, her critique of the service element as ostensibly key in a *thegn*'s status loses a lot of momentum, for it fails to explain, how a word with the core meaning "servant" (below, §3.3.1) came to denote an aristocrat. Despite much healthy criticism of Wulfstan, Senecal demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards his texts and generally indiscriminate approach to the chronology of cited sources. While she acknowledged his authorship and bias, she still largely recycled Wulfstan's tenets and, moreover, widely applied them to people not explicitly called *thegns* – the Domesday landed proprietors, that is. In spite of this critique, it is nevertheless most regretful that Senecal's insightful and meticulous original study went less noticed than it warrants, to judge from subsequent literature.[208]

2.2.1.3 21st century: descriptive and prescriptive history

Senecal's theoretical premises are also a prime example of what can, with due simplification, be termed a "descriptive approach" that seems to have become more popular in recent literature. Rather than prescribing *thegns* certain socio-legal qualities (such as *wergild* or service) presupposed by sources, historians of late tend to expose actual people by empirically summarising what original texts report about them and their families, their activities, relationships with others, etc.[209]

Ann Williams's multi-faceted 2008 study, based on the author's previous numerous works, recapitulates this empirical tradition well. The introduction underlined the practical blurriness of the *thegnly* stratum's upper and lower social boundaries. To a hard-and-fast definition of a *thegn* it preferred an elaborate synthetic portrait made of several, by now well familiar features: the division of the free Anglo-Saxons into *ceorlas* and *thegns*, upward mobility by virtue of holding five *hides* of land, 1,200-shilling *wergild*, stratified gradation among *thegns* depending on service to individual lords, etc.[210]

It must be stressed that studies such as the one just cited do not at all signal a breakaway from what one will be excused to name, by contrast, a "prescriptive approach". Recently John Hudson employed it. For him, *thegns*, graded by their personal affiliation with lords, are before all things a legal status with a hierarchy inside of it.[211] A similar synergetic picture

207 Senecal 1999, p. 24.
208 That being said, some of her theses (e.g., about the peer recognition of a *thegnly* status rather than royal sanction), condensed (in my opinion, thereby sadly less persuasive) and published as Senecal 2000, and received a wider acceptance, e.g., Shapland 2019, p. 145.
209 Shortly before Senecal's doctoral thesis, this method was utilised by Clarke 1994 in whose footsteps Senecal followed. A wider turn in the late 20th century from the constitutional to historical anthropological approach was also postulated by Reuter 1997, p. 179.
210 Williams 2008, pp. 1–9.
211 Hudson 2012, pp. 203–206.

that takes the best of both worlds was drawn by Simon Keynes in a corresponding entry for the *Blackwell Encyclopedia*,[212] and earlier still by J. Insley in a comparable entry for the *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*.[213]

Granted, a dichotomy between two modes of tackling Anglo-Saxon *thegns*, may to an extent be artificial and is useful more for historiographic compartmentalisation. The "descriptive approach" does not position itself in opposition to a putative "prescriptive approach". It rather builds on some of the latter's theses and augments them with concrete data.

***

The relevant bibliography is voluminous, but only a handful of selected pieces deal with Anglo-Saxon *thegns* as one of their main subjects, and most has been written about them in thematically removed works. When aspects of Anglo-Saxon *thegns*, covered in studies in various topics off multifaceted source material, get pieced together, the synthetic "reference model" becomes so inclusive and even self-contradictory (see Maitland's comments above, p. 42) as to potentially lose some of its heuristic force. Nevertheless, this model looks persuasive and provokes little dissent to no theoretical discussion regarding the social mechanics stitched into this model. For example, unutilised went Thomas Charles-Edwards's short but consequential problematisation off an Irish early medieval counterpart of the preconditions and effects of social status. Thus, it remains unscrutinised if the oft-reiterated and (as will be shown) putative *thegnly wergild* was a cause, consequence, or concomitant of the *thegn*'s social status, and if the cause, whether it was sufficient or necessary.[214] Last but not least and connected to the second point: even notionally different "descriptive" and "prescriptive" approaches put the same few sources – all coincidentally or not authored by Archbishop Wulfstan – at the foundation of the same "reference model". For such importance, the current chapter will now turn to these Old English texts.

2.2.2 Sources

The introduction to the current chapter asserts that of the itemised points of research interest it has been mostly to those grouped in research Question 2 that Anglo-Saxon *thegns* have seen a fair share of attention. Probably most conspicuous of the key notions – by necessity reiterated several times above due to their profound permeation of scholarly literature – surrounding the foundation of an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*'s status may be itemised as follows:

- 1,200-shilling *wergild*;
- (continuous) possession of land, more specifically the five-*hide* criterion as a necessary prerequisite for a *thegnly* status, most readily materialised in the *wergild*;
- *thegnly* service to various lords and a hierarchy of such service.

Perhaps not always reflected upon by extant historical literature remain two interconnected facts: that these notions are derived exclusively from Archbishop Wulfstan's writings and that the latter concerned less an accurate picture of the observed social conditions of his times and more an idealistic "orderly society" intended to rectify them (above, §1.3). Given the determinative nature ascribed to these features, as well as the central position they hold in the "reference model", scrutinising them appears fully warranted.

212 WBEASE, pp. 459–461.
213 RLGA XXX, pp. 405–411 (*s.v.* "Thegn").
214 Charles-Edwards 1986, pp. 55–56, – *cf.* Patricia Crone's similar reflections regarding status groups and their social standing relative to each other (above, p. 29).

2.2.2.1 1,200-shilling *wergild*

Somewhat at odds with modern scholarship,[215] in pre-Conquest Old English texts statements to the effect that a *thegn*'s *wergild* amounted to 1,200 shillings find only one unequivocal unique attestation in Wulfstan's so-called *Mircna Laga* ("The Law of the Mercians" – see full text in Appendix 1.3). A connected text, the provisionally titled *Norðleoda Laga* ("The Law of the Northern People", presumably the Northumbrians – see full text in Appendix 1.2), provides a list of *wergilds* estimated in certain enigmatic *thrymsas*,[216] which when converted into more familiar monetary units with the help of the *Mircna Laga*, yields a similar figure of 1,200 shillings. Both texts are part of his *Compilation on Status*[217] that also includes *Geþyncðu* ("On the Ranks of People and Law" – see full text in Appendix 1.1),[218] *Að* ("Mercian Oath"),[219] and *Hadbot* ("Priests' Oaths").[220] In what follows I present an abbreviated version of my previously and elsewhere made case to distrust the supposed normativity of the *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga* and instead to treat them as elements in Wulfstan's "grand theory".[221]

In agreement with one of the methodological tenets announced above (§1.7.2.2), let us perform a source-critical inquiry. To arrive at the required figures in the *Norðleoda Laga*, one needs to first convert the *ceorl*'s *wergild* expressed in *thrymsas*[222] into shillings with the Mercian four-penny reckoning,[223] but then to retroactively switch to the West Saxon five-penny values for the *thegn*'s 2,000-*thrymsa wergild*.[224] It is clear though that the author put the 6,000-penny *wergild* (i.e. 1,200 West Saxon shillings, the smallest round number in the tariff) as the cornerstone for his calculations. OE *tryms* is a rare monetary term and it had no stable orthographical realisation in Old English. The word was registered in the language's older strata when a golden coin of this name (LAT. *tremissis*, a third of a late imperial golden *solidus*) was still in circulation in Britain (*c.* 575×675 AD).[225] Later, OE *tryms* rendered less known monetary terms (LAT. *as*, *dragma*, *stater*). *Thrymsa*'s unique *þ-* spelling in the *Norðleoda Laga* suggests that while the ternary semantics was still perceived by the author, to what it applied had been forgotten or ignored. By contaminating it with OE *þrī* (three), the author rethought *thrymsa* as a unit of three pence. This allowed a neat conversion of round penny sums in round *thrymsa* values, which elegance would have been impossible had the *Norðleoda Laga*'s base unit been the Mercian shilling or Scandinavian

215 To an extent that OE *þegn* and *twelfhunde* in the legal material are sometimes understood mutually interchangeably: e.g., Lambert 2012, p. 18 (referencing Ine 70); Shapland 2019, p. 145 (referencing Af 40) – both authors write of *thegns* though their quoted sources read *twelfhunde*.

216 Qualifying it as enigmatic applies only to original Old English texts, because scholars since the 17th century have adopted *thrymsa* as a numismatic term for the early Anglo-Saxon golden coinage (Grierson, Blackburn, and Screen 1986, I, p. 157).

217 Also sometimes called the "*Geþyncðu* group".

218 Also sometimes called the *Promotion Law*(*s*) (at other times this alternative title can also apply to the *Norðleoda Laga*).

219 The name *Að* was given by Felix Liebermann who omitted "Mercian" from the title.

220 Felix Liebermann treated *Að* as a two-clause text, but Andrew Rabin re-categorises the second clause as the opening of *Hadbot*, and hence his title does not reflect the meaning of OE *hādbōt*. His, to my knowledge, are most comprehensive studies on the matter to date, on which I largely base my own assessment.

221 Sukhino-Khomenko 2021b.

222 Norðleod 6, p. 460.

223 Partially informed by the *Mircna Laga* itself, with an allowance for synonymity between regular pence and the *Mircna Laga*'s archaic *sceattas*.

224 Norðleod 5, p. 460.

225 Grierson, Blackburn, and Screen 2017, VIII, pp. 49–57. Outside the *Norðleoda Laga*, OE *tryms* in the late period only once appears as a gloss to Mt 17:27 in the Lindisfarne Gospels.

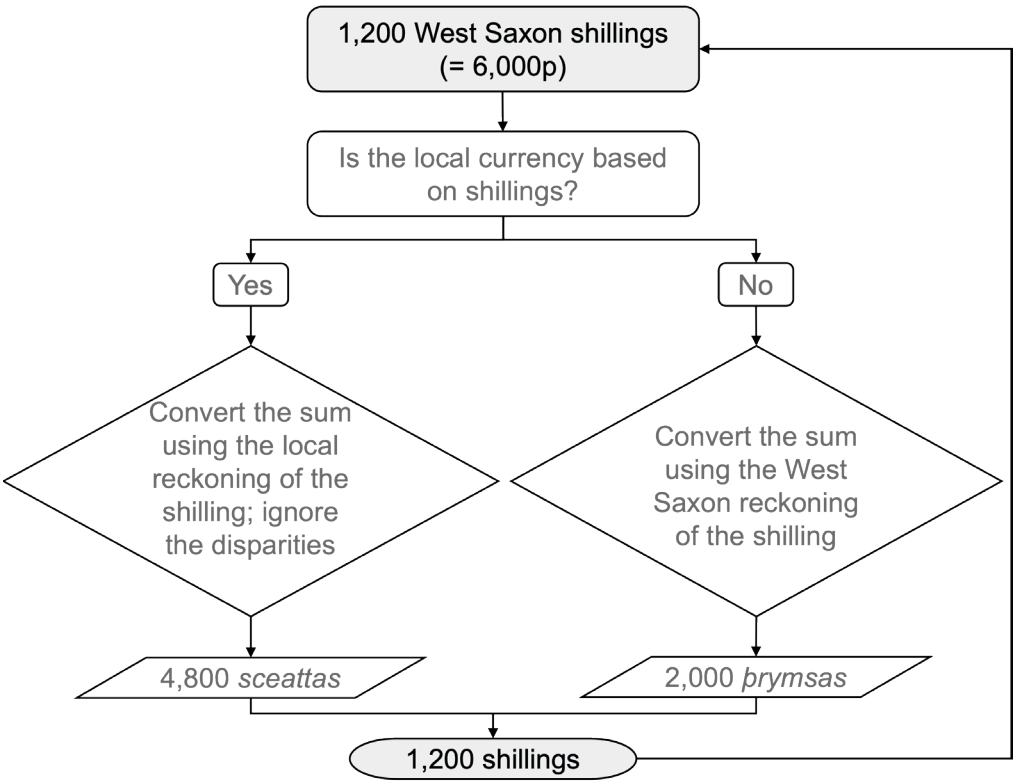

1,200 West Saxon shillings
(= 6,000p)
Is the local currency based on shillings?
Yes
No
Convert the sum using the local reckoning of the shilling; ignore the disparities
Convert the sum using the West Saxon reckoning of the shilling
4,800 sceattas
2,000 þrymsas
1,200 shillings

Figure 2. The possible logic in the *Norðleoda Laga* and the *Mircna Laga* when calculating the *wergilds*

monetary units attested in the "Danelaw".[226] The only reason why the *thrymsa* in Norðleod 6 got explained through the Mercian and not West Saxon shilling is the presence of the *Mircna* and not **Westseaxna Laga* in the *Compilation*, which in CCCC MS 201 immediately follows the *Norðleoda Laga* (Figure 3). To thus connect the *Compilation*'s two elements a bizarre figure of 266 *thrymsas* for a *ceorl*'s *wergild*, alien to the otherwise neat schedule, had to be inserted. The intermediate conclusion is therefore that the tariff in the *Norðleoda Laga* was a deliberate construct consciously built around the West Saxon monetary system and clumsily aligned with the Mercian for textual coherence (Figure 2).

Neither the texts' vocabulary, nor manuscript orthography actually support the supposition that the first half of the *Norðleoda Laga* contained some archaic Northumbrian "core" and that the *Mircna Laga* reported some old and genuine Mercian legal tradition. Lexicographically, the *terminus post quem* is not the 860s, determined by the borrowing of ON *hǫldr/hauldr/hǫlðr* (> OE *hold*; on it, see below, §4.4.2.3)[227] and suggested by Patrick Wormald, but rather the 930s dictated by the presence of another loanword, OE *lagu* (< ON *lǫg*, lit. law), first attested in King Æthelstan's tithe edict in the 930s.[228] "High reeve" first enters the corpus

226 OE *marc* < ON *mǫrk*, two thirds of a pound (160 pence) divisible into eight *ōran* (< ON *eyrir*) of 20 pence each, although evidence exists for a sixteen-penny *ōra*, too (Grierson, Blackburn, and Screen 2017, VIII, p. 365).

227 Pons-Sanz 2007a, pp. 48–50. OE *hold* is attested in the century between King Edward the Elder's reign, when it enters the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*: 904 [*recte* 903; MS A]/905 AD [MSS B, C, D]; 911 AD [MSS B, C, D]; 917 [*recte* 914; MS A]/915 [MSS B, C, D]; 917 AD [MS A]) and King Cnut's early reign, when it appears as a by-name or (occupational) title of one Þórbrandr (LAT. *Turebrant cognomento Hold*) in *De Obsessione Dunelmi*, written in the late 11th century (or even later) but describing much earlier events. On it see below, p. 164.

228 I As 2, p. 146.

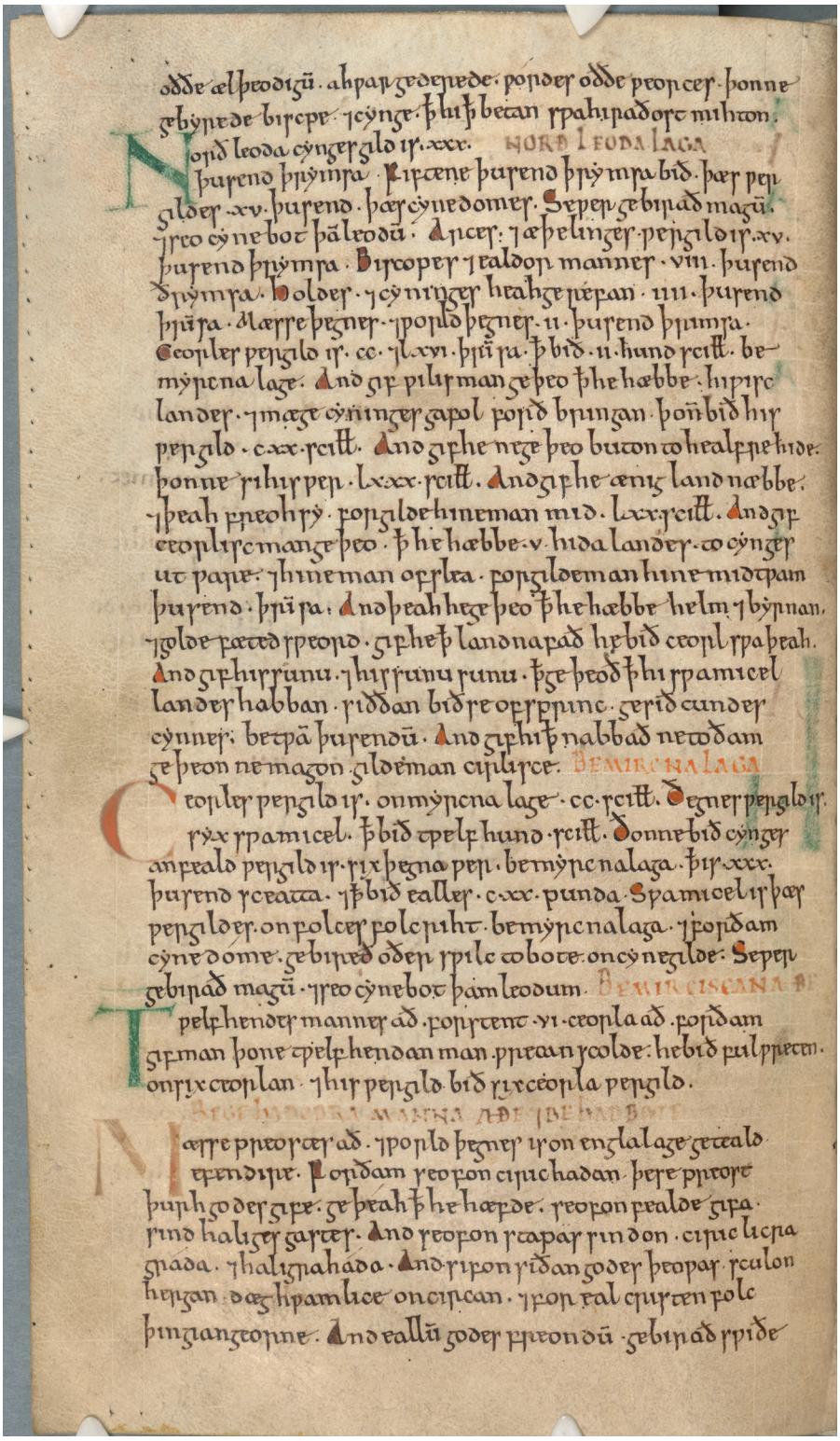


Figure 3. *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga* in CCCC MS 201, p. 102. Reproduced with the kind permission of The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

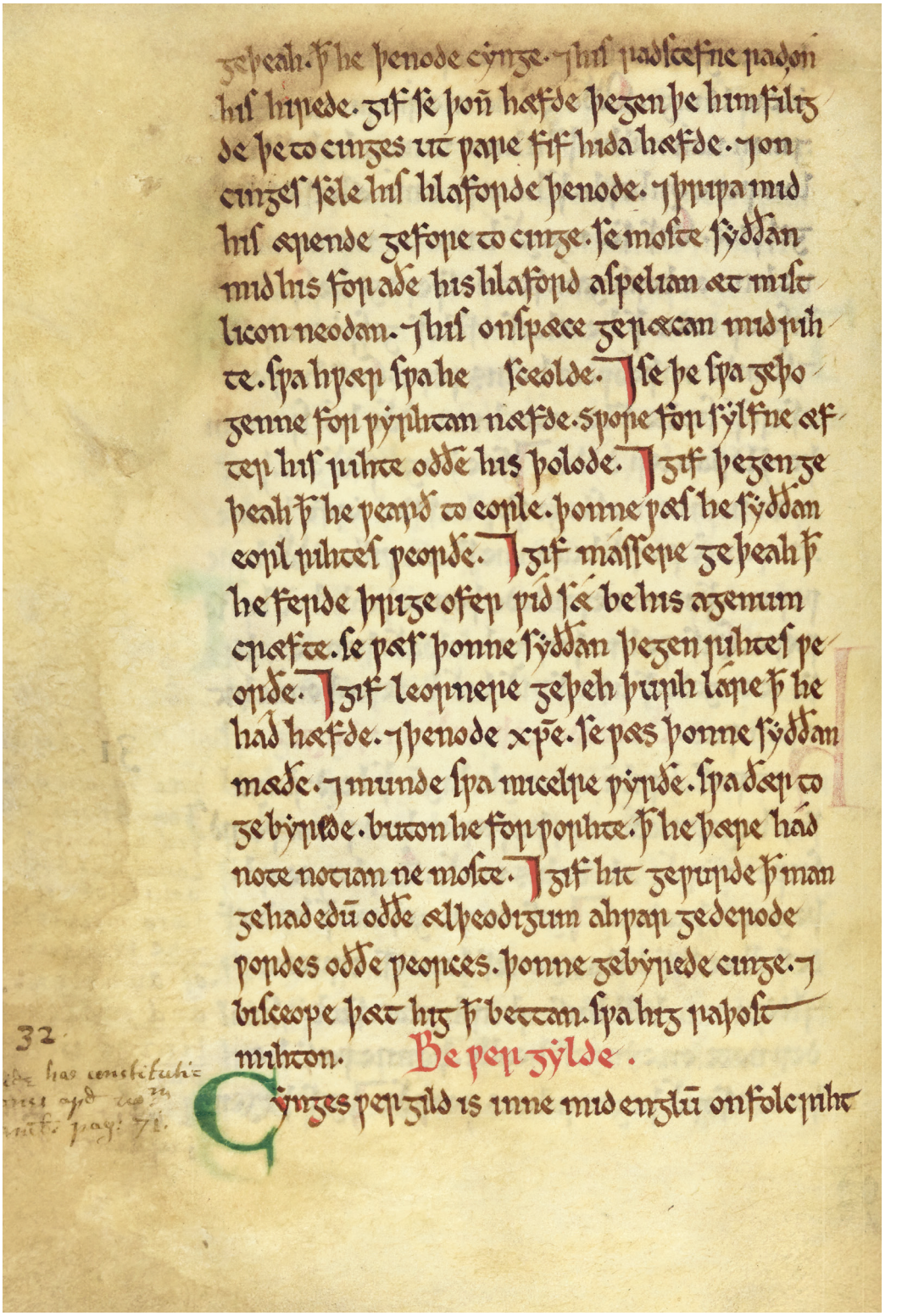


Figure 4. *Norðleoda Laga* in the *Textus Roffensis*, fol. 93v. Reproduced with the kind permission of Rochester Cathedral

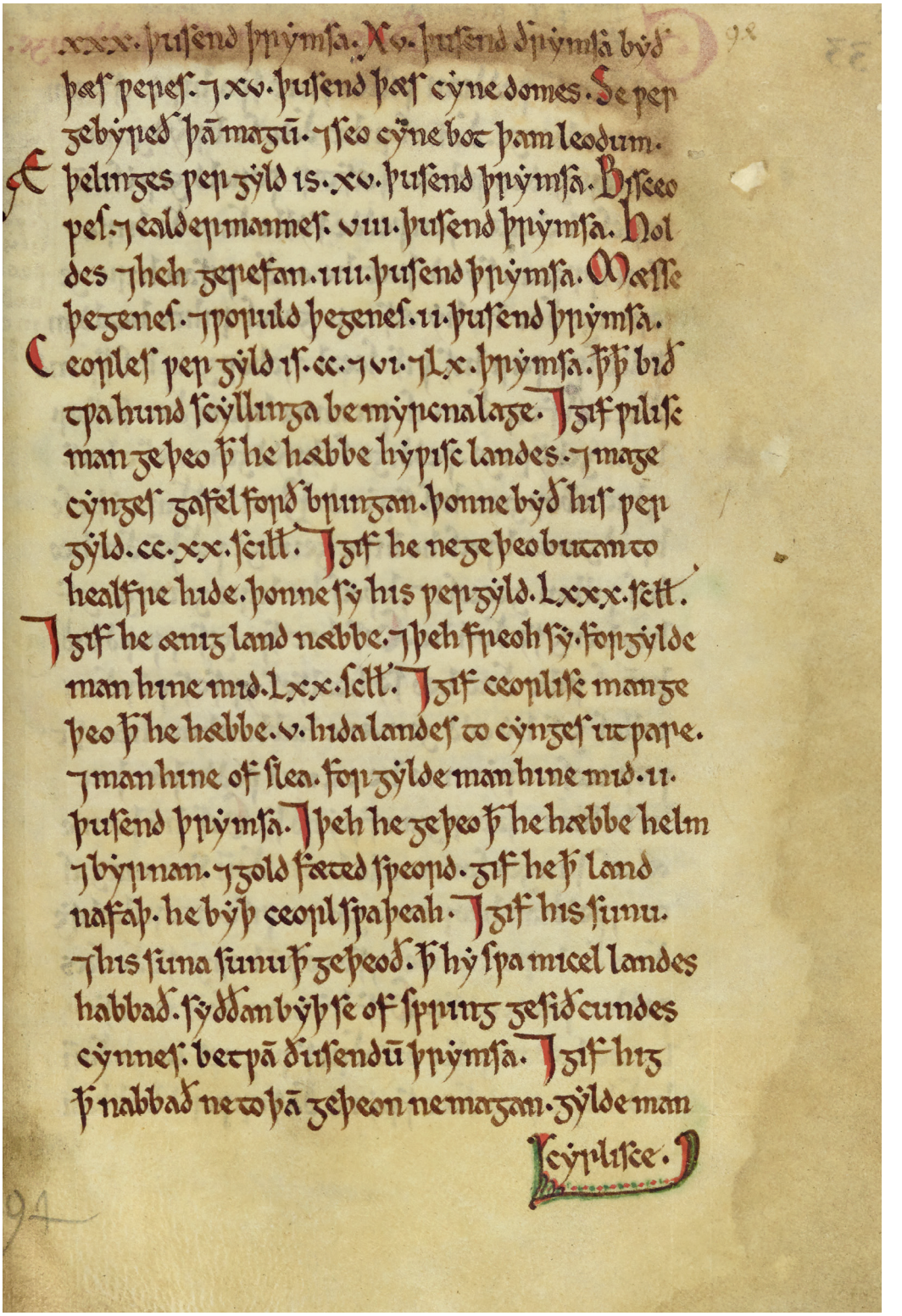
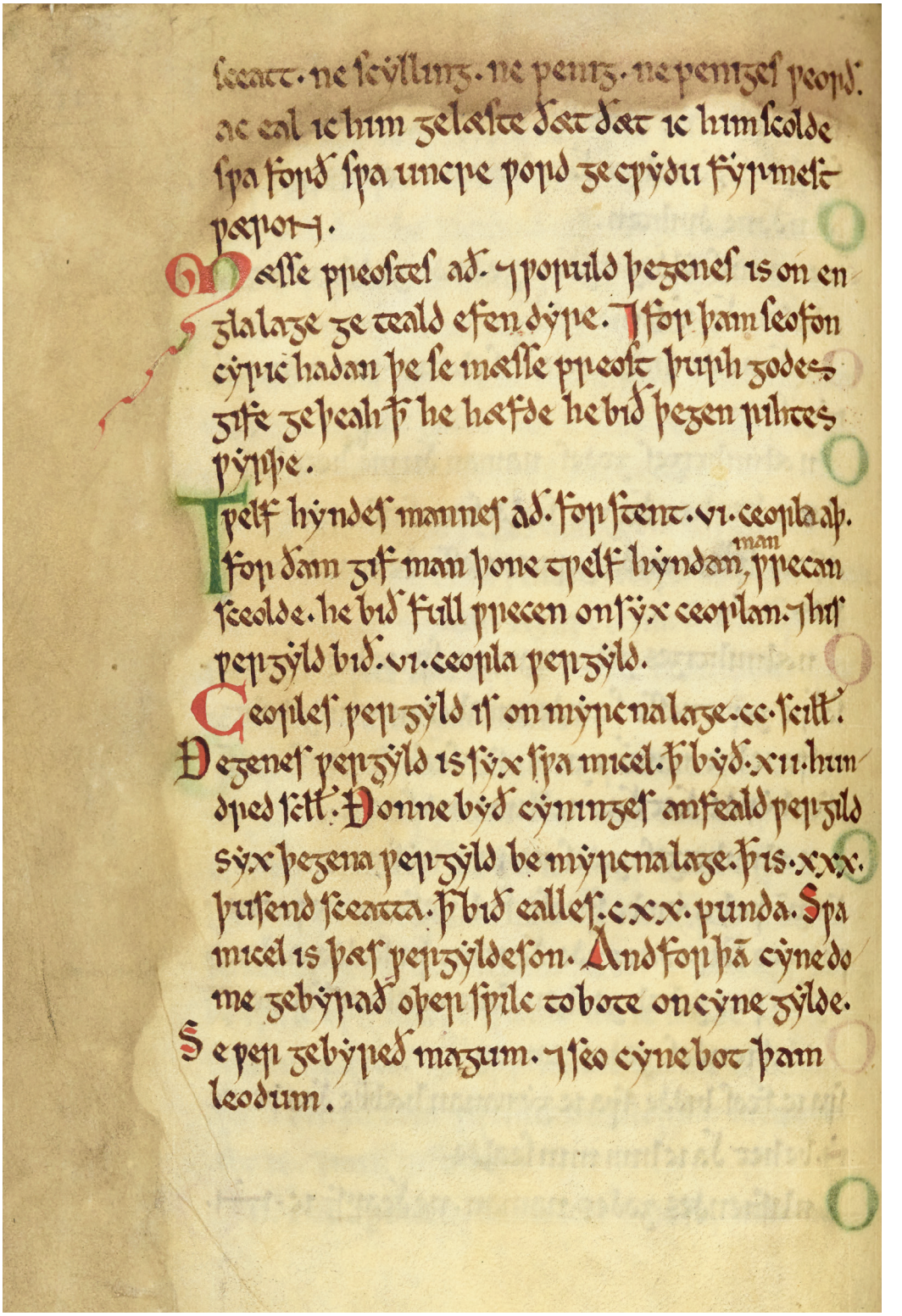

xxxx. þusend þrymsa. Xv. þusend dryms bỳd
þæt pepes. 7 xv. þusend þæt cyne domes. Se pep
gebỳred þā magū. 7 seo cyne bot þam leodum.
þelinges pep gyld is. xv. þusend þrymsa. Bisceo
pes. 7 ealdepmannes. viii. þusend þrymsa. Hol
des 7 heh gepefan. iiii. þusend þrymsa. Mæsse
þegenes. 7 þopuld þegenes. ii. þusend þrymsa.
ceorles pep gyld is. cc. 7 vi. 7 lx. þrymsa. Þ bid
þa hund scyllinga be mỳrcena lage. 7 gif þilise
man geþeo þ he hæbbe hỳpisc landes. 7 mage
cynges gafol fopd bringan. þonne bỳd his pep
gyld. cc. xx. scill. 7 gif he nege þeo butan to
healfre hide. þonne sỳ his pepgyld. Lxxx. scill.
7 gif he æniġ land næbbe. 7 þeh fneoh sỳ. fopgylde
man hine mid. Lxx. scill. 7 gif ceorlisc man ge
þeo þ he hæbbe. v. hida landes to cynges utþaue.
7 man hine of slea. fopgylde man hine mid. ii.
þusend þrymsa. 7 þeh he geþeo þ he hæbbe helm
7 bỳrnan. 7 gold fæted sweord. gif he þ land
nafap. he bỳþ ceorl spa þeah. 7 gif his sunu.
7 his suna sunu þ geþeod. þ hỳ spa micel landes
habbad. syddan bỳþ se of sprinġ gesidcundes
cynnes. be tpā dusendū þrymsa. 7 gif hiġ
þ nabbad ne to pā geþeon ne magan. gylde man
ceorlisce.

Figure 5. *Norðleoda Laga* in the *Textus Roffensis*, fol. 94r. Reproduced with the kind permission of Rochester Cathedral


sceatt. ne scyllinz. ne penz. ne penzes peorð.
ac eal ic him zelæste ðæt ðæt ic him scolde
spa foro spa unc̄e porð ze cyðu fyrmest
peron.

Mæsse preost. 7 porhild þegenes is on en
zla lage ze teald efen dyre. I for þam seofon
cyric hadan þe se mæsse preost þruh zode-
zife ze sceal þ he hæfde he bid þegen rihtes
pyrðe.

Twelf hyndes manes. ad. for sceat. vi. ceorla ah.
for ðam zif man done twelf hyndan, man þrecan
sceolde. he bid full wered on six ceorlan. 7 his
wer zyld bid. vi. ceorla wer zyld.

Ceorles wer zyld is on myrcena lage. cc. scill.
Degenes wer zyld is six spa micel. þ byð. xii. hun
dred scill. Donne byð cyninges ansealdwer zild
six þegena wer zyld be myrcena lage. þ is. xxx.
þusend sceatta. þ bið eallef. cxx. punda. Spa
micel is þæs wer zyldes on. And for þā cyne do
me zebyrad oþer spile to bote on cyne zylde.
Se þe zebyrged magum. 7 seo cyne bot þam
leodum.

Figure 6. *Mircna Laga* in the *Textus Roffensis*, fol. 39v. Reproduced with the kind permission of Rochester Cathedral

in two of King Eadred's diplomas[229] and then resurfaces at the turn of the millennium.[230] OE *þegn* began to be opposed to OE *ceorl* only towards the close of the 10th century (below, p. 125), which suggests a likely chronological span for the first clause in *Mircna Laga*. The manuscript spellings are late West Saxon and reveal no unambiguous orthographic traces of the specifically Northumbrian or Mercian dialects.[231] To salvage the Northumbrian "core" and original Mercian legal norms, we must assume a lost putative dialectal prototype and a complete subsequent re-writing to the level of uniformity in all three extant manuscripts.[232] In the dialect-sensitive *Textus Roffensis* (Figures 4–6) from 1122×1124 AD,[233] with its preservation of 7th-century Kentish forms, this Saxonisation further had to be inexplicably picky. Ockham's razor says "no": it is far more economical to admit the *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga*'s late West Saxon linguistic and lexical origins from the start.

Wulfstan's characteristic rhythmic style is lacking for the two pieces. But the lexis and ideas presented in them are nevertheless a clear indicator of his authorship. OE *mæssepegn* is a *hapax legomenon*[234] that echoes Wulfstan's *weōfodþegn* (lit. *thegn* of altar). OE *worldþegn* appears only in Wulfstan's recurrent motif of a legal parity in privileges between a priest and secular nobility.[235] The hierarchy from Norðleod 1–4 (king–archbishop/ætheling–bishop/ealdorman) is fully present in his Cnut's laws.[236] OE *Norðleod* (another *hapax legomenon*) could in theory mirror a similar formation by Wulfstan, OE *Norðengle* (lit. the northern English).[237] The *Textus Roffensis* redaction of the *Mircna Laga* (Figure 6) in the opening phrase contains

229 S 520 and S 544 (both 946 AD). Note my mistake in the 2021 article (at p. 22) where I dated the first entry to the annal for 778 AD and erroneously attributed it to the Alfredian "Common stock" of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In truth, this annal belongs to the "Northern Recension" incorporated in the Worcester (D) and Peterborough (E) redactions (Stafford 2020, pp. 112–115) and it was lifted from a now lost Latin northern annalistic source translated into Old English when the "Northern Recension" was put together in the late 10th century. In *Historia Regum*, probably incorporating the original wording, in place of OE *hēah gerēfa* the text reads LAT. *dux* (*tres duces* […] *necati sunt*; *SMOO* II, p. 46). Upon consideration, though, this correction only strengthens my argument, for the "Northern Recension" is by definition younger than the "Common stock" by almost a century. OE *hēah gerēfa* also figures in the *Blickling Homilies* (*BH* 15, ll. 11, 89) which are broadly dated to the 10th century. See a problematisation of status *vs* personal relationship in the office of high reevedom by McGuigan 2018, pp. 101–104. At p. 101 (n. 21), he further questions the previous logic of dating the *Norðleoda Laga* to before 954 AD because of the cessation of Northumbrian sovereignty and putative obsolesce of a king's *wergild* after this date, – a critique with which I agree.

230 *CH* I.4, l. 220; I.16, l. 161; I.29, ll. 60, 107, 111, 173, 223, 229, 249; *LS* I, *St Eugenia*, l. 9; *St Sebastian*, ll. 32, 158, 160, 182, 193; *St Agnes and St Constantia and Gallicanus*, ll. 16, 74, 107, 192, 211; *The Forty Soldiers*, l. 104; *LS* III, *St Dionysius*, l. 203; *St Cecilia*, l. 197; *St Chrysanthus and Daria*, ll. 293, 311, 308 (the list of Ælfric's texts to contain OE *hēah gerēfa* may be incomplete); *ASC*: 1001/1002 AD (MSS A, C, D, E).

231 See Campbell 1983, pp. 55–56, 131, 133, 135, 160.

232 A path into which Wormald's dating implicitly forced, e.g., Robert Fulk (2010, pp. 66, 77).

233 Wormald 1999, pp. 243–253.

234 In corpus linguistics, this term (< GR. ἅπαξ λεγόμενον, lit. being said once) describes a word or expression that can be found only once in a given corpus (usually of a whole language, but sometimes more restrictively, e.g., a corpus of literary works by one author). Lexemes that occur only twice are termed *dis legomenon*, those that occur thrice *tris legomenon*, and quadruple occurrences are, accordingly, *tetrakis legomenon*.

235 Geþyncðo 6, p. 458; Að 2, p. 464, V Atr 9:1, p. 240; VI Atr 5:3, p. 248; VIII Atr 28, p. 266; I Cn 6:2a, p. 290.

236 II Cn 58–58:2, p. 350.

237 Grið 13, p. 471, although note that "Northern English" as the people of the Earldom of Bamburgh in both Latin (e.g., LAT. *Saxon*[*es*] *Aquilonali*[*i*]) and vernacular (e.g., Irish Gaelic *Saxain Tuaiscirt*) sources recurs in foreign (Celtic) accounts (McGuigan 2018, pp. 97–98 *et passim*).

another Wulfstanism, *inne mid Englum* (lit. among the English).[238] The OE expression *on X lage*, as in Norðleod 6 and Mirce 1–3, is also fully consistent with the Archbishop's idiolect.[239]

Wulfstan's motives to draft the *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga* in their entirety are easy to come by as they organically build into his ideologeme of an "orderly society". When composing it Wulfstan did not hesitate to frame it as ostensibly rooted in hoary antiquity. This society was a return to the proverbial "golden age", which is why, as he did elsewhere (see §1.3), Wulfstan must have recycled some legal material from King Ine's law-code: the figure of 30,000 for killing royalty from Norðleod 1 and Mirce 1 occurs in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (currency not specified) with which the Archbishop was well familiar (above, p. 7);[240] Norðleod 7–7:1 and 9 overtly copy Ine 32 and 24:2; OE *gesīðcund* in Norðleod 11–12 probably leaked from Ine 50–51 and 54 (see collated texts in APPENDIX 1.2). In this context, resort to and rethinking of the otherwise outdated and vague *thrymsa* makes a lot of sense, if we remind ourselves that it was a markedly archaic term, not unlike OE *sceat*(*t*) used in the *Mircna Laga* instead of and synonymously with "penny" (above, n. 223), with an exotic flavour to it and, potentially, even a Northumbrian too.[241] Evidentially, archaisms such as these lent the text legitimacy.

Vignette 1. Suggested Non-Wulfstanian Evidence of a *Thegn*'s 1,200-Shilling *Wergild*

In my 2021 article,[242] I specifically focused only on Wulfstan's *Compilation on Status* as the unsatisfactory evidence of a 1,200-shilling *thegnly wergild*. Beside the *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga*, however, back in the day Henry Chadwick substantiated the case with the Scottish *Leges inter Brettos et Scotos* ("The Laws of the Britons and Scots", hereafter *LBS*)[243] and the *Succinctus Dialogus Ecclesiasticae Institutionis* ("Concise Dialogue on the Ecclesiastical Institutions", or *Dialogus* for short) by the York archbishop Ecgberht (in office 732/734–766). Finally, the Franco-Latin *Leis Willeme* also explicitly assigns *thegns* £25 and £20 of *wergilds* according to the West Saxon and Mercian reckonings, respectively (1,200 shillings either way).

None of these texts, in my opinion, bears the testimony that before 1066 AD, an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*'s *wergild* was by default 1,200 shillings (however counted). The *Leis Willeme*'s authority is undermined by, first of all, the date of composition (*c.* 1150?) that made the author very possibly familiar with Wulfstan's tracts. This is probably why the author gave two calculations: Mercian and West Saxon.[244] Of a direct borrowing from Wulfstan may also speak the lexical choice *en Merchene-/Westsexenelahe* that immediately brings to mind the Archbishop's *be/on Mircna* and *on Engla lage* (above, n. 239). Beyond that, the 'intellectual's exercise' that the *Leis Willelme* is, enjoys a highly dubious relation to any genuine Anglo-Saxon legal practice.[245] Accepting the *Leis Willelme*'s evidence further requires turning a blind eye to the incongruence in the very next sentence (that a *ceorl*'s *wergild* [*were del vilain*] was 100 shillings in both Mercia and Wessex) with the actual Anglo-Saxon legal fact (200 shillings).[246]

238 Grið 4, p. 470.

239 *On Engla lage* (Að 2, p. 464 and Grið 11, p. 471); *on Cantwara/Suðengla/Norðengla lage* (Grið 6, 9, 13, 13:2, respectively, pp. 470–471); discussed by Pons-Sanz 2007a, p. 72.

240 *ASC*: 694 AD (MSS A, B, C, D, E).

241 OE *tryms* is used most prominently in the botanic-medical treatise *Herbarium of Pseudo-Apuleius* (probably translated into Old English during the Northumbrian cultural heyday in the 8th century) and the Lindisfarne Gospels (*LG*, Mt 17:24–27).

242 Sukhino-Khomenko 2021b.

243 Taylor 2019, pp. 427–443.

244 'The wergeld of a thegn is £20 in the province of Mercia, £25 in the province of Wessex' (*La were del thein—XX lib. en Merchenelahe, XXV lib. en Westsexenelahe*; Leis Wl 8, p. 498).

245 Wormald 1999, pp. 407–409.

246 Leis Wl 8:1, p. 498.

The mid-8th-century *Dialogus*[247] includes a figure of 800 *sicli* for a *wergild* of a priest, but this fact turns out irrelevant. In 1905, Chadwick could not have known that all pairings of the legal standings of a *thegn* and clergyman belong to Wulfstan (his canon would be circumscribed only a few decades later) and not supported by any other source. Chadwick hence *bona fide*, if erroneously, used a priestly *wergild* in place of a *thegnly* one. Even if this circumstance was not enough, to prove that the *Dialogus* truly mentioned a 1,200-shilling *wergild*, Chadwick had to assume that it used the Mercian tally (i.e. 4,800 pence), to juggle weights, denominations, and coins, and most regretfully, to ignore the internal textual evidence itself. By any account, the *siclus* in this fragment is a regular silver penny. The same sentence cited by Chadwick reads that a monk's *wergild* was *quadrigenti argentei* ("four hundred silver [pieces]") and a few lines above, a fine for sacrilege was set at

> [...] twice the sum of thirty *sicli*, that is, we wish that the adulterers give the Church sixty *argentei*.[248]

If anything, this apparent synonymity between LAT. *siclus* and *argenteus* in the *Dialogus* must dissipate any connexion to the 1,200-shilling *wergild*, built around Chadwick's good-faith misjudgement regarding the *thegn* and priest's parity and rather convoluted intellectual numismatic yoga.[249]

As regards the tariff in the *LBS*, it uses the system 1 cow = 3 *orae* (< OE *ōra* [above, n. 226]) = 48 pence to calculate *wergilds* (*cró* in its own language). Among them, it is true, the life of a *thegn* or a *mormaer*'s son is estimated at 100 cows or 300 *orae* (= 1,200 Mercian shillings). Yet, for one, contrary to the 19th-century scholarship that informed Chadwick, the source's latest editor and commentator, Alice Taylor, mounts a case that the *LBS* contained little or no pre-1100 AD legal tradition and instead recorded the juridical thought of a far later period.[250] That a much later Scottish thane was a one-to-one reflection of the earlier Anglo-Saxon *thegn* requires substantiation, presently wanting. For the other, the *LBS*'s figure of 4,800 pence is part of a larger system unique to this text and not paralleled by any Anglo-Saxon legislation.[251] Respectfully to Patrick Wormald, his idea of a shared source by the *Compilation on Status* and *LBS*[252] does not answer why of all other values, the *LBS*'s compilators took only 4,800 pence and ignored the rest wholesale.

For what it is worth, it is my opinion that non-Wulfstanian sources about a *thegn*'s *wergild* do not stand a test of scrutiny. They are post-Conquest and are either likely under the Archbishop's influence or require a cherry-picking preferential selection of convenient figures.

247 This source (published by Haddan and Stubbs 1871, pp. 403–412) is critically understudied and was only recently given a proper due by Carella 2019. While the current study was being carried out, Dr Carella, as far as my knowledge extends, was working on a monograph preliminarily titled *Northumbrian Law before the Vikings*.

248 *…duplicata* [*sic*] *xxx. siclorum pecunia, hos est, lx. argenteos volumus dare ecclesiæ adultarentes* (Haddan and Stubbs 1871, p. 407). The editors had *duplicatǫ*, though the manuscript (BL, MS Cotton Vitellius A xii; available online at: <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_Vitellius_A_XII>, accessed 30 September 2020) reads *duplicatą* (also reproduced thus in Sir James Ware's first edition from 1664, and by Thorpe 1840, I, p. 90) which grammatically agrees with the instrumental ablative LAT. *pecunia*. I therefore cannot agree with the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*'s (DMLBS, *s.vv.* "siclus" and "argenteus") compilers' interpretation, which omits duplicata altogether, that in the Dialogus the siclus stands for the 'equivalent of two *argentei*'.

249 First, despite other evidence, Chadwick chose to understand *thrymsa* from the *Norðleoda Laga* only as a three-*scripulum dragma*, peremptory took the latter as equal to 3.41g (nominally one eighth of the Roman ounce), and operated with it only as a unit of weight (as in the *Herbarium*, though in the Lindisfarne Gospels it is obviously a coin). Then, he implicitly assumed that in the *Dialogus*, LAT. *siclus* (Kristen Carella renders it "shekels" and leaves it at that) was an alternative form of LAT. *sicilicus*, a late Roman unit of weight equal to six *scripula* (ca. 6.82g: Schulzki 2008). Finally, Chadwick argued that the Northumbrian coin at the time was minted at the weight of a *scripulum*, and so he concluded that the value of 4,800 pence by weight was respresented by the figure of 800 *sicli*.

250 Taylor 2019, pp. 243–263.

251 Converted to pence, it yields the amounts of 48,000; 7,200; 4,800; 3,200; 2077.6, and 768 pence for a king; a *mormaer* or a son of the king; a son of a *mormaer* or a *thegn*; a son of a *thegn*; a kinsman (*nepos* or *neuu*) of a *thegn*; and a *villein*, respectively.

252 Rabin 2015, p. 70 (n. 24).

2.2.2.2 landed property and five-*hide* criterion

Just as with the 1,200-shilling *wergild*, the only explicit first-hand testimony to support the ubiquitous historiographical *topos* about five *hides* as a distinguishing marker of a *thegn*'s condition can also be found in the *Compilation on Status*, *viz*. in its opening element, *Geþyncðu* (see a full text in Appendix 1.1). It further similarly gets reinforced through a chain of lexical-logical steps in the *Norðleoda Laga*. *Geþyncðu*'s second clause lists the prerequisites for a *ceorl* to be worthy of "*thegn*'s rights" (OE *þegenriht*, a *hapax legomenon*): personal royal service at court, high-status residence, including a church (chapel?), and five *hides* of "fully own land". This last-mentioned qualification is usually taken to mean a bookland (OE *bōcland*), a complex Anglo-Saxon legal phenomenon that we will dip our toes into in Vignette 3. The syntactically messy clause 3 lays out that a *thegn* who actively serves a king's *thegn* (who, in turn, too performs certain duties for his royal master) and has 'five hides for the king's service' (*to cinges utware*) may act as a deputy for this lord of his in (minor) legal cases by swearing an oath on the lord's behalf. Clauses 9–12 in the *Norðleoda Laga* superficially corroborate that a *ceorl* who possessed 'five hides of land for his obligations to the king' (*to cynges utware*) was entitled to a 2,000-*thrymsa wergild* (reserved for a 'secular thane' in the same text above). The text then conditions this rule by a requirement of the land to stay in family for three generations – otherwise, the incumbent's *wergild* remained a *ceorl*'s, even when he possessed conspicuously expensive military gear. Why one possessor of five *hides* would serve the king but another not and instead submit to the former, is left unexplained. Nor do our sources report historical facts of a change in status of anyone ever acquiring five *hides* of land.

In the absence of non-Wulfstanian testimonies, we ought to look for confirmations of the *Compilation on Status*'s claims in the five-*hide* system itself. What can be taken as explicit mentions thereof appears in two sources. A passage in King Ine's law-code endows a Welshman in possession of five *hides* with a 600-shilling *wergild*,[253] five times more than a Welsh possessor of just one *hide*.[254] What principle governed this promotion on the *wergild* ladder is left unexplained in the source. It may have something to do with the code's unique system of assessing the value of a purgatory oath in *hides* instead of money. The only second evidence comes four centuries later in *Domesday Book*. In Berkshire, one warrior from five *hides* had to answer a royal levy summons (for offensive campaigns?), and all others (out of the four remaining?) paid him salary at the rate of four shillings over two months.[255] A similar provision with some variation is recorded for Malmesbury.[256]

Back in the day, John Round went to great lengths to validate off the Domesday material that throughout the hidated part of England there existed a grid of five-*hide* units (superseded in the "Danelaw" by a six-*carucate* grid), each responsible for providing one man for the army and possibly paying the *heregeld*, and that this arrangement went against

253 Ine 24:2, p. 100.

254 Ine 32, p. 102.

255 'If the King sent an army anywhere, one man-at-arms only went from 5 hides and for his supplies or pay 4s were given to him for 2 months from each hide' (*Si rex mittebat alicubi exercitum, de . v . hidis tantum unus miles ibat . ⁊ ad eius uictum vel stipendium de una quaque hida dabantur ei . iii . solidi . ad . ii . menses*; *DB* i, fol. 56c [BRK B10]).

256 'When the King went on an expedition by land or sea, he had from this Borough either 20s to feed his boatmen, or he took with him one man for (each) Honour of five hides' (*Quando rex ibat in expeditione vel terra vel mari, habebat de hoc burgo aut . xx . solidos ad pascendos suos buzecarlos. Aut unum hominem ducebat secum pro honore . v . hidarum*; *DB* i, fol. 64c [WIL B5]).

the economic grain.[257] Frederic Maitland took an opposing view that tax assessments followed the economic potential of manors (their "value": see below, n. 1198). Round, though, convinced Maitland of the superiority of own explanation, and so the latter did not pursue his thesis further.[258] Charles Hollister used Round's findings in his theory of the 'select *fyrd*' and generalised the Berkshire and Malmesbury one-soldier-from-five-*hides* quotas nation-wide. Richard Abels later performed a select linear regression analysis of the Domesday data that rather supported Maitland's position: Domesday monetary and fiscal values correlate too closely for a subjective division of land tenements.[259]

But an exceedingly fierce debate unfolded afterwards, with the publication in the 1980s of a few radical works by two Australian scholars, the economist John McDonald and sociologist and theorist Graeme Snooks.[260] Crudely put, the two argued against Round's thesis of the hidages' extra-economic and commanded-from-above nature. There followed prompt responses by the Domesday scholar John Hamshere[261] and R.A. Leaver,[262] later augmented by Andrew Wareham, Xiangdong Wei,[263] and Robert Cohen.[264] Strictly speaking, the disputants very quickly moved away from the problem of the five-*hide* grid and instead battled over artificiality and economic rationale behind Domesday hidages. In its present state, while some of McDonald and Snooks's conclusions have received appreciation, the debate is at impasse. Not least, an apparent glaring gap in academic and theoretical premises may contribute to this stalemate, which is also, perhaps, why both sides accused each other of arbitrariness and methodological flaws. Arguably, what the discussion firmly established amounts to the following:

- Fiscal assessments were at some point indeed organised from above but did take account of economic realities.
- The Domesday inquest captured the once performed fiscal apportionment at the stage of decay when it remained more serviceable for taxation rather than conscription, because, as Leaver pointed out, 'a tax liability is divisible in a way that a man is not'.
- Hidages defined (leastwise some) military recruitment ratios. But that all conscription was universally underpinned by a five-*hide* quota requires leaps in argumentation and expanding individual, sometimes provincial cases kingdom-wide.[265] Furthermore, Abels argued convincingly that quotas such as this were aimed not at individuals who had to personally show up for service, but rather at landlords (collective, in

257 Round 1895, pp. 44–69 (reworking his 1888 paper).
258 Bridbury 1990, p. 308.
259 Abels 1988, chap 5, reproducing an earlier 1984 article.
260 McDonald and Snooks 1985a–c; 1986.
261 Hamshere 1987b. An immediate response followed in the same issue by McDonald and Snooks 1987, also in turn responded by Hamshere 1987a.
262 Leaver 1988 with a somewhat aggressive critique of the opponents. The latter's latest contributions to the debate was McDonald 1998.
263 Wareham and Wei 2007, pp. 214–227.
264 Cohen 2018, pp. 105–109.
265 A good basic summary of various quotas is presented by Lavelle 2010, p. 59 (table 3.1). To them must be added S 1409 (1051×1055 AD; Rob 111) – a reduction of service 'at the king's summons' (*to cinges banne*) from 1.5 *hides* to a notional 1 *hide*; and S 1186a (799×801 AD) – a conscription of "only" (*tantum*) five men from a 30-*hide* estate (a reduction from six recruits, thus proving the five-*hide* quota?).

case of towns) who acquitted their holdings with fixed armed contingents[266] (also discussed and exemplified below, §3.4.4.7.

- The more time passed since the initial assessment, the more deviations accumulated, and in historical Wessex the system underwent maximum erosion. Cohen's statement that, 'in many instances, five hide units were no longer visible by 1066', begs the question when and if these units existed at all.

The weakest point in the five-*hide* argument is Round's knowledge of whatever few mentions of five-*hide* principles, antecedent to his finding of a grid of the same pitch. A suspicion persists that the factor of five surfaced because of Round's original techniques[267] and potential (though, granted, unprovable) predisposition to finding the said grid.[268] As indicated by Leaver, the statistics looks even more impressive if we include '"near misses", which are here arbitrarily defined as totals within one hide of a five-hide multiple of ten and above'.[269] As it stands now, the question about the (non-)existence of the five-*hide* grid appears less unambiguous than in Round's time. Further research is needed to test its non-happenstance by, first, trying other geographical units of measurement and/or summating them differently, second, choosing other mathematical factors (especially not prime), and, last but not least, with modern computation technology, this falsifiability check-up must be done on the national, not individual shire level.

Most importantly, even should we accept the five-*hide* recruitments system, it does not really fit the *Compilation*'s description. The system, Hollister emphasised, was indifferent to the status of the warrior, which contrarily was exactly Wulfstan's focus. Thus, in the cold light of the day, our only authority on a five-*hide* criterion for a *thegnly* status is the *Compilation on Status* by a highly ideologically informed author who recycled it from the period to which he looked up as an example of a "golden age".

2.2.2.3 a *thegnly* gradated hierarchy

The most vivid testimony about *thegns* serving other lords/*thegns* is the already cited passage from *Geþyncðu* (above, p. 56). But the evidence exceeds Wulfstan's corpus alone:

- direct mentions in Old English literature;
- direct mentions in Bishop Oswald's lease documentary series; mentions in Queen Edith and Bishop Ranulf's single writs;
- direct mentions in *Domesday Book*;
- potential mention in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*s.a.* 1051 AD).

But even still, upon closer examination, which will be performed in full in CHAPTER 3, these items turn out to offer only poor confirmation of *thegns*' non-royal service, let alone a

266 Not all Abels's theses have been unanimously accepted though. Of more modern literature, see Lavelle 2010, pp. 47–107; Molyneaux 2015, pp. 79–82; Lambert 2017, pp. 114–119, 129, with a special attention to Nicholas Brooks's preceding dissenting opinion.

267 He relied almost exclusively on the data from one of the Domesday satellites, the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, and had to group holdings into vills (leaving out a definition of a vill altogether which could make hidage gerrymandering tempting, if unreflected) to detect the otherwise dissipating grid. On Round's handling of *Domesday Book*, including criticism of extrapolating the Cambridgeshire data kingdom-wide, see Baxter 2017, pp. 235–239.

268 He overtly stated that it has a direct importance for the question of Anglo-Norman continuity (Round 1895, p. 293, – *cf.* above, n. 185).

269 Leaver 1988, p. 529.

coherent hierarchical pyramid. In the first item on the list above, OE *þegn* actually describes common servants in the most general, generic sense, very often a translation of LAT. *minister* (in the Bible, also LAT. *servus*), plain and simple, which explains OE *þegn*'s appearance in these contexts in the first place. Nothing speaks of people thus called as high-positioned individuals. In other words, if anything, here we are not dealing with a sense applicable to social stratification or status. Of the second item, Bishop Oswald's land-leases to his *thegns* and Queen Edith and Bishop Ranulf's addressing their respective *thegns* are undeniable. Yet it will be shown that Oswald's scribal staff actively adopted literary praxes in contemporaneous royal chanceries. The two writs just mentioned equally replicated royal counterparts in full. In other words, it is unknowable if this use was anything sociologically more meaningful than a cultural mimesis. As for the third point, Domesday occurrences of "X, a *thegn* of Y" circulated fully synonymously with other lexical expressions of personal commendation, most frequent among them LAT. *homo*. Once Domesday references to lords' *thegns* are mapped, it becomes evident that they are most probably dictated by information collection patterns (Domesday Circuits). In other words, LAT. *tainus* in *Domesday Book* likely reflects the scribes' lexical preferences and not social conditions they were describing. To drive the argument to its maximum, one cannot exclude that commissioners arbitrarily applied LAT. *tainus* to people who never identified (themselves or by their social milieu) as *thegns*. And when it comes to the fourth item, CHAPTER 3 will argue that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s.a.* 1051 AD used OE *þegn* in the sense of landed proprietors liable for royal army service rather than of armed retainers of a non-crowned lord.

This brings us back to Wulfstan's *Geþyncðu*. Even should we ignore the Archbishop's ideology, that jumps out at his readers, and his prescriptivist zeal to regulate, as well as look past his appeal to the idealised past in clause 1, there is a good reason that OE *þegn* here is not a technical term. In clause 2, Wulfstan copied the norm about a lord's deputy from King Æthelred's Woodstock law-code from about a decade earlier.[270] In it, the king's draftsmen called a lord's stand-in his reeve. What is more, Wulfstan himself later reproduced the same provision in King Cnut's laws, and there, he called the deputy the *thegn*'s 'trustworthy man' (OE *getreōw mann*; also below, p. 202). All that *Geþyncðu*'s clause 2 confirms is that Wulfstan, like Domesday commissioners, used various lexemes to describe personal relationships between a subaltern and a principal, of which OE *þegn* was one, quite possibly an immitation of the royal discourse. Methodological critique may, in the end, question a pyramid of *thegnly* service construed with reliance on such changeable lexis.

More dependable evidence that gradation among *thegns* existed is Wulfstan's tariff of *heriots* (< OE *here geatwa*, lit. military gear) – customary bequest of weapons by a man in personal lordship of a potent figure to his superior. Because the Archbishop integrated this schedule into King Cnut's laws (see full text in APPENDIX 2),[271] these stipulations appear more officially sanctioned rather than just one man's law-like ideological confection. Obstructions to taking this list at face value persist, nevertheless. One is its declarative nature. As persuasively argued long ago, the section (clauses 69–86) to which the list belongs probably originated as royal promises and guarantees of a fairer policy. They could have been King Cnut's putative coronation charter but at any rate likely incorporated King

270 The first redaction of the *Compilation on Status*, present in CCCC MSS 201 and 190, is dated by Andrew Rabin to 1006×1008 AD. The Woodstock code is not internally dated. But it likely formed a pair to the Wantage law-code, which was probably promulgated in 997 AD.

271 II Cn 71–71:5, pp. 356–358.

Æthelred's conditions of re-enthronement in 1014 AD upon his return from Normandy, one of which was that he 'would be a gracious lord to them, and reform all the things which they all hated'.[272] The text is eager to mention that lords may take no more than only "proper *heriots*" (*rihtan heregeate*) and that *heriots* are to be proportional to the payer's status (*swa hit mæðlic sy*). This suggests that the *heriot* custom had been abused before which leads us into the other problem, namely how much Wulfstan's hierarchy actually functioned like clockwork. Twenty-two extant Anglo-Saxon wills include *heriots*,[273] of which only six to a certain degree match clause 71:1 (one could also potentially match clause 71:4) and one clause 71a. Others deviate significantly. That the match rate is so low should not surprise, given how little the preserved sample is (60 wills for the whole Anglo-Saxon period). But two out of the six wills just mentioned are episcopal – are we to assume that bishops counted as kings' *thegns* 'who stand in immediate relation to him'?

A lot of weight, it seems, has further been placed on OE *medeme* (lit. midmost) and, implicitly, on the absence of OE *cyninges* in clause 71:2. At times, all mid-tier late Anglo-Saxon landed proprietors are seen as such "midmost" (*alias* "median", "mean", "middling", or "lesser")[274] *thegns*. Occasionally, the divisive line between them and kings' *thegns* will be drawn at exactly whom service was owed to. Other criteria have been put forward as well, e.g., by Peter Coss (with prudent remarks from Peter Clarke) and David Roffe (below, p. 182) who cautiously suggested that king's *thegns* also distinguished from "median *thegns*" by virtue of being entitled to the fiscal-juridical privilege of "sake and soke"[275] (on it, below, p. 177 and n. 998). Upon closer look, one testimony, the will of one Ketill Alder,[276] seems to indeed confirm that "midmost *thegns*" from Wulfstan's line-up served lords other than the king. Ketill's *heriot*, bequeathed to Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury (in office 1052–1070, previously Bishop of Elmham), does match clause 71:2 almost perfectly. But the context of King Cnut's laws is suggestive of the king, not a third party, as the recipient.[277] The same Domesday passage that contains the Berkshire five-*hide* custom also recounts the *heriot* of a 'thane or a King's household man-at-arms' and it also fits clause 71:2. Next, Ketill is known to have been commended to both the archbishop and king[278] – so, *stricto sensu* he remained a king's *thegn*. Finally, to be pedantic, from the Domesday records he appears to have been an East Anglian who in Wulfstan's scheme paid £2 (syntactically

272 Stafford 1981 (quotation from p. 181). Pons-Sanz 2007a, pp. 159–163, discussed the authorship and Wulfstan's involvement into drafting of this document.

273 Lavelle 2010, pp. 116–120.

274 Williams 1995, pp. 72–74, 84 *et passim* coined 'ministerial thegnage' to describe such non-royal *thegns*.

275 Coss 2003, pp. 25 (n. 24), 29.

276 S 1519 (1052×1056 AD; *Wills* 34).

277 The 12th-century Franco-Latin adaptation and recycling of King Cnut's laws, the *Leis Willelme* ("The [so-called] Laws of William I"), weakens this conjecture, though, as it equates Wulfstan's "midmost *thegn*" with the Anglo-Norman *vavassor* and explicitly assigns his *heriot* to his liege-lord (Leis Wl 20:2, p. 506). Below will be argued why post-Conquest evidence of this sort is problematic and why especially so in case of the *Leis Willelme* (picked up in VIGNETTE 1). We cannot rule out that the author of the *Leis Willelme* re-interpreted Wulfstan's text as he saw logical – *nota bene* that while the Archbishop never specificated to whom the *heriots* on his list were to go, the author of the *Leis Willelme* did. The "midmost *thegns*" on Wulfstan's original list seem to have confounded many later writers – *cf.* the *Instituta Cnuti*'s author reformulation (below, p. 70).

278 His status varies from entry to entry: King Edward's *thegn* (*DB* II, fol. 416b [SUF 34,6]), 'free man (and) *thegn*' (*DB* II, fol. 421a [SUF 37,6]), Stigand's *thegn* (*DB* II, fol. 254a [NFK 32,2]), 'a free man of Stigand's' (*DB* II, fol. 264a [NFK 48,3]), and simply free man (*DB* II, fols. 223a [NFK 19,15], 230b [NFK 21,2], 233a–b [NFK 21,24 and 21,27–28], 264b [NFK 48,1–2], 271a [NFK 60,1]).

not clear if this sum superseded the West Saxon *healsfang*[279] or took the role of the whole render) and which Ketill did not. Either he overdid his *heriot* by rendering weapons in lieu of money, or he underpaid altogether (the latter more probable). Thus, that Ketill's will is the sole surviving specimen of a "midmost", non-royal *thegn*'s testament,[280] is not fully unproblematic: clause 71:2 related to the king and his liegemen and the coincidence with Ketill's will must be accidental and/or emulating the precedent of relationships between the king and his *thegns*.

2.2.3 Summary and Implications for Ensuing Research

Presumably, an unspoken challenge for scholarship on *thegns* is to emancipate it from a literal reading of Wulfstan's *Compilation on Status* as the first-to-pick Old English text and to heed the author's edifying intents. Historians have long since the pioneering studies by Dorothy Whitelock and Dorothy Bethurum in the 1940–1950s come to appreciate and comprehend Wulfstan's socio-ideological agenda.[281] Under young King Cnut after 1018 AD, Wulfstan, effectively, led the royal legal secretariat and at the same time evidently did not leave the *Compilation on Status* out of sight. This continued interest resulted in an updated contemporaneous redaction, preserved in the *Textus Roffensis*.[282] It is startling that, when actively recycling own earlier pieces in Cnut's law-code, the Archbishop stopped short of reproducing the *Norðleoda Laga*, *Mircna Laga*, or *Geþyncðu*. Now, how much an official, royally approved status of a given provision actually caused its widespread practical, to the letter, implementation has been much discussed (below, §3.2.1.2). In any case, the textual interplay above suggests that the "*Geþyncðu* group", unlike other Wulfstan's takes on the "orderly society", was not intended for an even attempted enforcement by the king's governmental apparatus, if such a modern anachronism is appropriate.

For all that we know, Wulfstan's texts 'participate in a broader effort to re-imagine Anglo-Saxon legal history',[283] and regardless of how much they 'share an interest in rank and social status',

> [...] many of the practices they record do not conform to those found in more mainstream royal legislation [...] It seems more likely here that Wulfstan is conjuring an idealised legal past rather than accurately recording a legal present.[284]

The *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga*, it is argued above, never contained any autochthonal, age-old local normative component and were drafted by Wulfstan as, to quote Andrew Rabin again, a

> [...] series of interdependent texts organized and framed in a fashion that gestures towards a comprehensive model of an ordered English society.[285]

279 A portion of *wergild*, known to be used as compensatory payment to close kin of slain man, probably one tenth of a slain's *wergild* (Hudson 2012, p. 938 [*s.v.* "healsfang"]).
280 Clarke 1994, p. 91.
281 Rabin 2020, p. [6]. Even distrustful readers of Wulfstan, e.g., Senecal 1999, pp. 17–28, and Banton 1981, chap 9, find it possible to reconcile retelling the *Compilation on Status* with criticism of him within adjacent pages.
282 Rabin 2015, pp. 184–185.
283 Rabin 2015, p. 188.
284 Rabin 2015, p. 68.
285 Rabin 2015, p. 183.

The texts clearly gave preference for symbolism over monetary exactness.[286] To their authorial origin speaks how their stipulations on *thegns* match each other, as if made in heaven – compare it to how Wulfstan's *heriot* tariff far from perfectly relates to the known dispositions in extant wills. It is only but this one highly biased composite text, whose author never concealed but rather advertised his vested ideological interest in social matters, on which hinges the postulate of a default 1,200-shilling *wergild* as a supposedly distinguishing[287] and definitive[288] feature of a *thegn*'s social standing prior to the Norman Conquest. The lack of further independent evidence[289] leaves this element of the "reference model", to be perfectly candid, a less substantiated criterion than one could wish.

The same can be said about the five-*hide* criterion. The comprehensiveness of the five-*hide* grid may be exaggerated and its uniformity is hard to substantiate. Its very existence is often deduced from the same through-and-through ideologically loaded *Compilation on Status* itself. Notable is Wulfstan's evident dialogue with King Ine's laws. There is no positive guarantee that the five-*hide* rule was not borrowed from there as a forgotten but fitting element for the "orderly society", given Wulfstan's nostalgic tone ('it once was that...').[290] Even if not, it is only the *Compilation*'s constituent components that somehow situate *thegns* in this system. To paraphrase Richard Abels,

> To use these documents to establish the universality of the five-hide rule and at the same time to prove that thegns' [status was its derivative] is, of course, to argue in circles.[291]

The *thegnly* hierarchy seems more tenable. After all, inner pyramidal pecking orders are a commonplace among elites throughout history (above, p. 25). But untenable seems the idea that this was an overarching, intended to penetrate all social strata, hierarchy of service with the determining factor in the (non-)royal status of the liege-lord. Even discounting non-royal clients, there are indications that Wulfstan was after bringing extraneous order into a messier reality. This pursuit of compartmentalisation manifests itself in how he likely modelled the *heriot* gradation on a clearly self-defined hierarchy of English churches and sometimes even the same lexical terms.[292] If *heriot-* payers gave heed to Wulfstan's tariff, they took their licence with it.

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286 Thus, in the *Mircna Laga*'s own arithmetic, the mathematically correct royal *wergild* ought to be 28,800 *sceattas* but Wulfstan prefers thirty thousand as, first, a round and elegant number and, second, rooted in tradition reported in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. When drafting a complicated explanation that would take into account the apparent discrepancy between the 6,000- and 4,800-penny *wergilds* by West Saxon and Mercian tallies in the *Norðleoda Laga* and *Mircna Laga* by assuming that both eventually represented the value of 300 ounces of silver by weight, Stewart Lyon had to admit that it still 'create[s] problems of its own, such as the interpretation of the compilation on status attributed to Archbishop Wulfstan, and it stops short of accounting for the variations in the weight of the minted penny' (Lyon 1969, p. 219).

287 E.g., epitomised by Stenton 1932, p. 115: 'Many of [the thegnly class] can only have been distinguished by their wergild of twelve hundred shillings from the higher ranks of the peasantry around them' (*cf.* a very similar statement by Stenton 1971, p. 469, and through Henry Loyn's mediation by Coss 2003, p. 24).

288 E.g., 'The victim's kindred, as is well known, had the right to receive a wergild in compensation for their kinsman's life. This was status-dependent: a thegn's wergild was 1,200 shillings whereas an ordinary ceorl's was 200' (Lambert 2012, p. 18).

289 Two post-Conquest and one mid-8th-century texts that were not treated in my 2021 article and that have been brought in as such alleged evidence are dissected in Vignette 1.

290 *Hit wæs hwilum…* (Geþyncðo 1, p. 456).

291 Abels 1988, p. 110.

292 I Cn 3:2, p. 282, itself a recycling of VIII Atr 5:1, p. 264 (see parallel lexis below, Appendix 2). The hierarchy is rather straightforward (from top to bottom): cathedrals, "median" (collegiate [?] minster?) churches, churches with graveyard, and chapels with no graveyards. Beyond doubt, Wulfstan was here reworking the nomenclature from King Edgar's Andover law on tithes (below, p. 121).

In summary, Wulfstan's texts and more specifically, the *Compilation on Status*, to borrow Thomas Charles-Edwards's words on a similar matter, are

> [...] indeed of great historical value, even if one restricts oneself to what it has to say, leaving aside entirely, for the moment, the further issue of how far what it says is true.[293]

But as much as *thegns* are concerned – individually or collectively, – it hardly can form a firm basis for a socio-historical investigation, such as the one proposed in research Question 2. The *Compilation*'s source status should be demoted from the gospel truth (as was wont in Sharon Turner's time), to one man's belief about the proper place of aristocracy in an "orderly society" – a legally defined and regulated status group (*der Stand*), a privileged high-tier stratum in a broader social stratification (see above, §1.6.2.1).

2.3 Scandinavian *Thegn*

Throughout the 20th century scholars hotly debated the identity and nature of the *thegns* known from runic inscriptions. Despite many a counterargument, the general audience is presently normally served a modified "Aakjærian" interpretation, as in, for example, the brochure of the *Christian Vikings in Varnhem* (sw. *Kristna vikingar i Varnhem*) exhibition (first launched in 2017):

> *Thegn* is a title that is attested in England from the seventh century, referring to a warrior in the king's service or someone enjoying the king's trust. [...] In Västergötland there are about thirty runic stones [...] in memory of the men who were called thegn and even *very good thegn*. These [...] were presumably local chieftains who placed themselves and their own subjects at the king's disposal. They swore loyalty to the king of the Danes and took part in military expeditions to the west. [italics in the original][294]

The origin of the quote above goes back to the thought-provoking academic works of the Swedish archaeologist and lawyer Carl Löfving, who unequivocally interpreted Western Swedish *thegnly* runic inscriptions as a testimony to the Danish presence in this region.[295] Other accessible neo-"Aakjærian" pieces recently saw light too.[296] What non-specialist audience does not learn from these accounts is that though interest to *thegns* gradually faded in the absence of newer evidence, scholars actually never settled on the matter. Paragraphs below will sketch the development of this discussion as well as go back *ad fontes* and examine Aakjær's original methodology first-hand.

2.3.1 Historiography

2.3.1.1 19th century: "fairly general terms"

In Nordic historical scholarship of the 1800s, *thegns* attracted only the Danish legal historian Johannes Steenstrup's attention, and only inasmuch as he posited that this lexeme 'is just as much a Danish word as it is an ancient Anglo-Saxon' (*er lige saa godt et dansk Ord, som det er urgammelt angelsaksisk*). Steenstrup in many respects reflected his elder English

293 Charles-Edwards 1986, p. 53.
294 Vretemark 2017, p. 14.
295 As might be expected, a popular brochure does not provide references. Nevertheless, the derivation of the statement from Löfving's thesis is not only natural but was at some point kindly confirmed to me by Dr Vretemark in personal communication.
296 E.g., Larsson 2002 (with highly artistic maps); Löfving 2005.

contemporary William Stubbs. Both were political conservatives and both were patriots interested in tracing national origins of their respective countries as far back in time as possible,[297] but for diametrically opposite reasons following their homelands' relative power in the late 19th century. Stubbs aimed at explaining England's peculiarity and continuity that laid the foundation for the future empire; Steenstrup sought to document Denmark's past contribution and legacy abroad, including in England.[298] Steenstrup's vision of *thegns*, though, followed closely that of Stubbs: they were a noble legal rank (DAN. *standsklasse*) initially derived from kings' closest servants, and studying Anglo-Saxon ranks itself was 'a prerequisite for understanding the following argument, or the overall Danish influence in England' (*nødvendige til at forstaa det Følgende eller de Danskes Indflydelse i England*). Steenstrup followed his British colleagues' suit and distinguished strata among *thegns* bound to serve different lords, ascribed *thegns* a 1,200-shilling *wergild* and a hereditary status open to landed proprietors not born *thegns* but with more than five *hides*.[299]

Otherwise, as aptly observed by the Danish medievalist Aksel Christiansen (1906–1981), prior to 1927, ON *þegn* used to be treated by students of Scandinavian history "in fairly general terms".[300] Arguably, without laying excessive weight on it, the commonest and simplest definition from the medieval Scandinavian *Provincial Laws* was offered by the Norwegian scholar Ebbe Hertzberg (1847–1912): in Scandinavia, a *thegn* was

> [...] a free and independent practitioner of all rights of a person fully vested with liberties.[301]

2.3.1.2 20th century: "camp vassalage" and "camp local leadership"

Svend Aakjær's 1927 article and Karl Martin Nielsen's reply eighteen years later heralded a new interest in and polemics on Scandinavian *thegns*. The respective positions, labelled above "camp vassalage" and "camp local leadership" respectively, and wider implications they have are summarised above (p. 4), so here it is worthwhile to sketch the methodological premises that gave ground to such differing interpretations.

Aakjær's chief thesis was that,

297 Torstendahl 2011, p. 271.

298 On his general historical purviews, see Gissel 1993 and other contributions by the same author. Steenstrup's later historical work was assessed as poor – his archaeological section as 'thin and otherwise outdated before its appearance', his treatment of literary sources as a 'hopeless revival of Danish legendary history' – by Christensen 1969, p. 22. The Danish legal historian Ole Fenger (1972) discussed Steenstrup's contribution to the study of the "Danelaw", since then largely refuted (Lund and Hørby 1980, p. 17) although Niels Lund's own interpretation of King Æthelred's legal codification of the "Danish law" as a royal 'flagrant encroachment' on local customs has too been questioned since (see discussion by Stattel 2019). Rolf Torstendahl's claim that Steenstrup's study 'was ignored by British historians because it was not translated into English' (Torstendahl 2011, p. 268) is somewhat unfair to Steenstrup's contemporaries who mentioned him at least in passing (e.g., Chadwick 1905, p. 240; Stevenson 1912, p. 22 [in Ludvig Falkman's retelling, though]; Stenton 1971, p. 720).

299 Steenstrup 1882, chap 5, §19.

300 '...i ret almindelige udtryk' (Christensen 1969, p. 220).

301 '...fri og uafhængig udøver af alle en fuldtberettiget persons rettigheder' (Hertzberg 1890, p. 266). *Cf.* an almost verbatim definition by Hjalmar Lindroth: "...man who is free and independent and who exercises all legal rights pertaining to such a person" (*man som är fri och oberoende och som utövar alla en sådans rättigheter*; Lindroth 1918, p.59), probably recycling Johan Fritzner's dictionary (1876) from half a century earlier. Curiously, Hertzberg's Swedish contemporary and colleague, Knut Fredrik Söderwall (1842–1924), in a similar paper on the Swedish material just a decade prior did not consider ON *þegn* worth including on a list of words in need to expounding on (Söderwall 1880).

> [...] though the meaning of these various expressions [that mention *thegn* and *dreng*] shows through but vaguely, there seems nevertheless little reason to believe that they should only stand for "man" pure and simple.[302]

Through his familiarity with multiple scholarly traditions by virtue of holding a degree in English, German, and Danish studies,[303] Aakjær circumvented the insufficient runic context by

> [...] turn[ing] to other languages which have older sources of a more comprehensive character, such as the Old High German, but more especially Old English.[304]

Aakjær overall recycled Stubbs and Chadwick's interpretations with an emphasis on royal service. He concluded that, as in England, in the 'old Danish kingdom', *thegns* (and *drengir*, for that matter) used to be 'royal servants, members of the king's attendant nobility and of his hird or bodyguard',[305] corresponding to landed 'nobility' in England.

Nielsen considered such methodology Aakjær's main weakness. He pointed out that, looking at the runic material as such while not having notions of *comitatus* in mind, it is impossible to arrive at Aakjær's conclusions. Together with his German colleague, the philologist Hans Kuhn (1899–1988), Nielsen argued forcefully that the empirical observations on skaldic poetry argue against Aakjær's interpretation. Kuhn had earlier found that in contemporaneous skaldic verse, only in six of the 72 occurrences of ON *þegn* known to him was this lexeme used as a designation of rank (GER. *Rangbezeichnung*). He distinguished it from poetic kennings through a pronominal or genitival overordinate, i.e. a combination of a noun for "man" or "warrior" (ON *maðr*, *rekkr*, *þegn*, and *drengr*, in Kuhn's own selection) with a possessive pronoun or *genetivus possesivus* of another noun.[306] Kuhn also posited that ON *þegn* conveyed an ethical rather than an exclusively social sense and that it relatively quickly evolved its meaning into the one formulated by Hertzberg. Nielsen, in turn, saw *thegns* as the backbone of the 'ancient Danish society' (DAN. *det gammeldanske samfund*) made of allodial farmers (DAN. *odelsbønder* < ODAN. *athelbøndær*), as the contemporary historical discourse would have it.

Beside the aforementioned younger Aksel Christensen among the "Aakjærian" historians, the most prominent among the "Aakjærian" runologists was perhaps Erik Moltke (1901–1984). With another major expert on runes, Lis Jacobsen (1882–1961), Moltke supported Aakjær's position from the start[307] and, unlike the older Christensen,[308] never wavered.[309] *Thegns*' association with the royal retinue, for Moltke, came to the fore in the supposedly martial context of the Glavendrup inscription (on it below, Excursus 2). But Aakjær's article struck an especially strong chord with those whom Eric Christiansen rather pejoratively branded the 'state-formation addicts'.[310] Moltke's authority lent support to

302 Aakjær 1927, p. 9.
303 Aakjær's biography was consulted from Bjørn 2011.
304 Aakjær 1927, p. 15.
305 Aakjær 1927, p. 28.
306 Kuhn 1944, pp. 105–106, 110–111.
307 Moltke 1932, p. 83; Jacobsen and Moltke 1935, p. 190, to give a few examples.
308 Younger Christensen (1945, pp. 32–37) accepted Aakjær's thesis, but older Christensen (1969, pp. 216–222) later left this cause.
309 For late Moltke's summaries, see Moltke 1985, pp. 285–286.
310 Christiansen 2002, p. 335. Exploring this subject in depth is not part of this study, but the relevance of this long-standing historiographical strand cannot be ignored. Suffice it to say here that its origins could be traced back to the Hegelian contraposition of the "historical" *vs* "non-historical" people and emergence of

the Danish archaeologist Klavs Randsborg's (1944–2016) short yet ambitious explanatory model of the emergence of the early medieval Danish kingdom. He interpreted runic *thegns* as agents of the Jelling dynasty who granted "fiefs" to its "vassals", which fact rune stones supposedly marked in landscape from which such land-tenure praxes had hitherto been absent.[311] Not everyone happily accepted Randsborg's methodology,[312] but it won the favour of prominent scholars Peter and Birgit Sawyer,[313] so much so that it sometimes necessitated exceptions to otherwise regular patterns they themselves traced. A case in point is their sinuous explanation to exempt "good" *thegns* (and *drengir*) from all other people described as "good" in runic inscriptions and who fall in the same elite social category as continental *boni homines*, by considering the adjective "good" (and similar) as an indication of *thegns*' putative status in the royal *comitatus/hirð* hierarchy.[314]

Aakjær's synthesis, however, had the least convincing effect on philologists who held that primary sources are more relevant than comparative methodology.[315] Picking up from Nielsen, they pointed out that Aakjær's reading does not follow from Old Norse sources in isolation, hence should the Anglo-Saxon "reference model" be removed, the whole case would be unsupported. The American scholar John Lindow agreed with Hans Kuhn that if in the Viking Age ON *þegn* conveyed the technical sense of a social rank, it 'left no trace in the language of the skalds' (hence it never was a technical term), and that approbatory adjectives present in all *thegnly* inscriptions were nothing more than laudatory epithets. Conversely, ON *rekkr* (*cf.* OE *rinc*) statistically fit Kuhn's *Rangbezeichnung* criteria significantly better. Lindow conceded, though, that in later Old Norse narrative sources ON *þegn* could 'refer to a liegeman' but explained this fact as a later medieval English influence.[316] The same influence was conceded by Judith Jesch who, too, renounced any technical meaning of ON *þegn*. Unlike previous critics of Aakjær, she consistently joined the skaldic corpus with the runic, for contrary to, e.g., Lindow, she could not see enough context to nuance individual lexemes' senses, but like her predecessors, applied a strict context analysis as well. Her initial results were that in the skaldic verse, ON *þegn* was applied to those whose resistance to growing royal power was being crushed,[317] and she further found 'little or

state as the transition from "pre-history" not worth examining. The later surge of national Romanticism would alter this view: Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, praised the "Germanic" abhorrence of a strong government. But state as a hallmark of historicity would remain a departing point for many discussions to come – consider, e.g., the opening chapter in Klavs Randsborg's book: 'Vikings and the State' (see below, n. 311). Janson 1999, pp. 18, 76–91, observes the change of the periodisation by the Swedish archaeologist Oscar Montelius (1843–1921) who spoke of the "heathen period" (SW. *hednatiden*) in 1873 but of "pre-historic period" (SW. *förhistorisk tid*) in 1897 (*cf.* Janson 2004; 2006).

311 Randsborg 1980, pp. 3, 23, 31–33, 40.

312 See some strenuous criticism, e.g., by the Danish runologist Stoklund 1991, and a milder one by Nielsen 2005, pp. 110–114.

313 Sawyer 1988, p. 34; Birgit's appendix (pp. 23– 26) in Sawyer 1994, pp. 10–26; 1993, p. 142.

314 Sawyer and Sawyer 2001, pp. 372–378. Respectfully, here the Sawyers indulged themselves with wishful thinking and presenting their take as a proven fact ('...there seems to be general agreement that thegn and dreng denoted retainers in the royal «hird», and that the common epithet «(very) good» meant «of high birth»', at p. 374) and mentioned only Judith Jesch's 1994 article (below, n. 319) as merely 'another opinion', thereby sidestepping all previous discussion.

315 Summary lists of early "Aakjærian" and future "Nielsenists" can be found in: Nielsen 1945, p. 111; Elgqvist 1947, pp. 116–118.

316 Lindow 1976, pp. 106–112.

317 A very similar opinion independently was expressed by Morris 1998, who too concluded from the skaldic evidence that *thegns* similar to *landmenn* and 'were also of considerable standing within their localities, although they hardly ever had titles such as *jarl*' (at p. 154).

no overlap' with the senses present in Old English.[318] At a later stage Jesch rejected any connexion between *thegns* and the Jelling dynasty,[319] rooted the former in landscape of local power, namely a 'social structure that [...] was soon to fall to new ideas of kingship, aristocracy, and vassalage', and argued against the Sawyers' interpretation of the "good" and similar evaluative adjectives.[320]

Besides the Swedish place-name scholar Jan Paul Strid's (1947–2018) re-introduction of toponymical evidence (SW. *Tegnaby* and similar), who still expressed a rather ambivalent view,[321] and a somewhat arguable paper by Axel Christophersen,[322] the 1980s marked two attempts at reconciling the two camps. Niels Lund (1939–2021) presupposed a theoretical improbability of the Jelling dynasty's content with competition for power with the local petty chiefs. Unable to convincingly demonstrate ties between such characters and the kings, Lund hypothesised a partnership type of association. Kingship lent its authority to the top social strata by acknowledging them as notionally its men. The latter in return paid homage to the Jelling kings.[323] This view was contrast to Randsborg's postulate of a hierarchical (quasi-)feudal relationship. Carl Löfving took this idea further, thereby in fact inspiring the Sawyers' simultaneous treatment of the same material. Over the course of two decades, Löfving problematised power relations around the basin of Skagerrak and Kattegat. One of his arguments was that at the turn of the millennium, Gautland was governed and influenced not by a ruler from Uppsala or Sigtuna but by the Danish monarch, who from 1018 to 1035 AD was King Cnut. Bearing in mind that Cnut also sat on the English throne, and that in England kings' followers generally went under the title of *thegns*, Löfving maintained that this interpretation should be accepted for the Scandinavian toponymical and runic material too. The mechanism by which this title entered the Scandinavian lexicon implies the local elite voluntarily joining the Jelling dynasty's conquest of England in the 1010s, adopting the *thegnly* title from across the sea and then bringing it back to their homeland. The runic *thegnly* inscriptions, in this explanation, therefore mark both the authority the Danish monarchy wielded and the social support it could recruit.[324] Löfving and Peter Sawyer further used this evidence to charter the geographic scope of the Jelling dynasty's political gravitas: in other words, it was postulated to have reached there where *thegnly* (and, lest one forget, *drengly*) runic inscriptions can be found.

Löfving should be credited for, what seems to be, the first historical contextualisation of the rune stones in question. His argument persuaded, for instance, Niels Lund later in his career who, albeit, still expressed himself reservedly and somewhat agnostically,[325] as

318 Jesch 1993. In some respects, Jesch's paper mirrored Ann Williams's later monograph in moving away from absolute definitions and instead providing elaborate descriptions (above, p. 45).
319 Jesch 1994, later integrated and developed in Jesch 2001, pp. 217–232.
320 Jesch 2011, esp. pp. 41–44.
321 Strid 1986.
322 Christophersen 1982, pp. 115–134.
323 Lund and Hørby 1980, pp. 61–62.
324 Löfving 1984 (reproduced and integrated in Löfving 2001, pp. 79–102). See also other publications by the same author.
325 Lund 1996, pp. 124–125. Similarly, at earlier stages, whereas Peter Sawyer was convinced by Löfving from the start, Birgit, whose work Lund cited, still expressed uncertainty: '[...] "thegns", i.e. landowners of substance who *may* have been dependent on the Danish king' (Sawyer 1988, p. 28; my emphasis).

well as Philip Line[326] and the archaeologist Claes Theliander,[327] but not, for example, the historian Timothy Bolton.[328]

2.3.1.3 late 1990s to 2010s: revisions and attenuation

Besides Löfving's major contribution and Jesch's progressing joining "camp local leadership", the past quarter century saw two long revision articles in the topic.

The historian and linguist Martin Syrett set out to review Aakjær's theses by performing a context analysis of the skaldic verse, runic inscriptions themselves, later Old Norse prose texts, and toponymics. Along the way, he made a few novel observations: that *thegnly* rune stones more likely reflected local commemorative traditions than conscious royal policies; that toponymical material does not well match the runological; that skaldic metrical straightjacket could have nudged poets to use ON *þegn* more than the word's exact or technical sense; and some others. At the end of his survey, expectedly, Syrett rejected Aakjær's claims. Perhaps more importantly, he offered a convincing clarification of why his ideas, despite empirical shortcomings, gained such wide a circulation. Syrett, like Eric Christiansen would in the future, explained it as born

> [...] largely from the necessity of positing *some* royal officers somewhere to account for the development of the Danish state in the tenth and eleventh centuries. As Peter Sawyer put it, "kings must have had agents ... not only to lead local defences but also to gather royal resources". [italics in the original][329]

The American Lauren Goetting never mentioned Syrett's critical review in her own later article on the same theme. This apparent independence made her conclusions even more convincing because they to a great degree overlapped with his. Having revisited the skaldic verse and runic inscriptions (but not prose texts or place names), Goetting, too, rejected ON *þegn* as a putative *comitatus* term. Like Syrett and later Jesch, she also refused to see the invariably present laudatory adjectives as any self-sufficient indicators of social status *per se*. At the same time, Goetting countered some of Jesch's arguments, first among them her generalisation from two *vísur* by the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson (995–1045) that in skaldic verse, ON *þegn* 'in almost all the occurrences' bore a 'connotation of resistance that must be crushed'.[330] Goetting instead brought forth a few undisputed cases when the word can be best understood as generic "people" or even "king's subjects".[331]

Despite this critique, Sawyers–Löfving's theories solidified their indirect and much refined influence. Philip Line, for instance, cited neither Syrett nor Goetting and fully accepted Löfving's treatment. In his work on Upplandic and Södermanlandic runic monuments, the Swedish runologist Marco Bianchi formulated a very subtle case. According to him, the seven *thegnly* inscriptions here, distinguished by an unparalleled Södermanlandic commemorative ON formula *þróttar þegn* (lit. *thegn* of strength; see distribution at Map 1), do indeed mark a south-western (Danish) influence, but cultural rather than political. ON *þegn*, Bianchi writes, is a highly controversial lexeme that originally meant a 'high-ranking royal official' but in the Viking Age it underwent a semantic widening, and so could apply

326 Line 2007, pp. 62–63, 219–220, 508.
327 Theliander 2005, p. 23.
328 Bolton 2009, pp. 229–230, 246.
329 Syrett 1998, p. 268.
330 Jesch 1993, p. 168.
331 Goetting 2006.

to important local notables. The Södermanlandic "*thegns* of strength" in this explanation were local *nouveaux riches* who, having procured themselves fortune abroad, resorted to the prestigious language and graphic imagery of power from the Danish cultural stock to legitimise their social standing.[332]

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With the exhaustion of arguments, by the late 2000s, the discussion faded. Syrett's pointed historiographical remark potentially compromised the "Aakjærians" and their drawing of runic *thegns* into the context of the early medieval political consolidation in the North. Marco Bianchi was happy to acknowledge the complicated and evolving semantics of ON *þegn* as it never figures as a cornerstone for his study. Neither did it so for Niels Lund or Philip Line, who brought in the *thegns* only cursorily.

To better assess this historiographical discussion, one should turn to the primary sources at the heart of it.

2.3.2 Sources

Aakjær's 1927 article was easy to follow and written in accessible academic English. In the manner of that age, however, he abbreviated his apparatus to such an extent (for example, 'P. 6. Edward I., B. R. Rot. 7' at p. 23) that checking his sources may present a challenge to those unfamiliar with the ins and outs of the scholarly tradition of that time. For a scholar not well-read in Anglo-Saxon matters, especially in the pre-digital age, it could have become a daunting task, one supposes. For this or maybe other reasons, participants of the heated discussion sketched above seem to have not duly appreciated a glaring flaw in Aakjær's arguments at inception.

2.3.2.1 King Cnut's "Forest Laws" (*Constitutiones de Foresta*)

Much of Aakjær's assessment, it is apparent, was guided by the interpretations he discovered in the available Anglophone historiography of the day. In it, *thegns*, as expounded on it in §§2.3.1.1–2, were often credited with an elevated social position. But juxtaposing them exclusively to *drengir* does not follow from even the very post-Conquest sources brought out by Aakjær himself. In the 12th and 13th centuries, MIDE *dreng* can be paired with a whole array of Middle English and Latin lexemes for status: MIDE *swein* (< ON *sveinn*), MIDE *frē-man* (< OE *frēo mann*), MIDE *knĭght* (< OE *cniht*), LAT. *smalemannus* (< OE *smæl mann*), *miles*, – and not solely with MIDE *thein* (< OE *þegn*). Nonetheless, Aakjær posited that *drengir*

> [...] constituted a sort of inferior nobility during the period prior to the Conquest, ranking between *þegnas* and *ceorlas* [and] belonged to a lower order of thegns, the minor thegns, with smaller estates than the thegns proper.[333]

To confirm this thesis, he constructed a lengthy chain of interdependent and interlaced arguments. An abbreviated version thereof could be itemised as follows:

1. Back in the day, Steenstrup 'convincingly explained' that the indigenous Old English name for the people called *drengir* used to be "yeoman".
2. The 'the hunting and forest laws of King Canute' stipulated that '4 men are to be elected to supervise felling and hunting, and that they should be chosen from among

332 Bianchi 2010, pp. 156–162 (esp. p. 158); 2016 (esp. pp. 14–16, 24–26).
333 Aakjær 1927, pp. 20, 25.

the *mediocres homines, quos Angli læs-þegnas nuncupant, Dani vero yoong men* [*yongermen* in other MSS] *vocant*'[334] ('men of lesser importance, whom the English call *læssþegenes* [lit. smaller/minor thegn] and the Danes, *yongermen*').[335]

3. Ergo, *drengir* were indeed a lower stratum of the *thegns* (*dreng* = yeoman = *læs-þegn*).

In actuality, Steenstrup's equation of yeomen to *drengir* is highly contentious by modern standards, a separate dissection of which can be found in Vignette 2. Another part was built on the same supposed 'hunting and forest laws of King Canute'.[336] So Aakjær's resort to Steenstrup earlier work is in effect a circular argumentation, severely undermined by the two scholars' honest belief in the self-representation of the said "laws".

These "laws" are the *Constitutiones de Foresta* ("The Forest Regulations", after the opening and concluding phrases).[337] They have absolutely nothing to do with King Cnut and belonged to one of the post-Conquest legal pieces of literature of a variable 'proportion of truth and untruth'. The *Constitutiones*, Patrick Wormald concluded, 'may, therefore, reasonably be called a "forgery"',[338] as they were written by an anonymous Anglo-Norman clerk sometime after 1123/4 AD. The *Constitutiones* reported the norms of their time and most likely possessed no actual legislative force themselves. Virtually nothing can be gathered about the author's biography or background. But with the help of inner source criticism, Sara Harris has been able to convincingly reconstruct the author's probable ideological motive for composing this text: to offer means of ethnic reconciliation between the Normans and the English by alluding to an earlier precedent of a supposedly harmonious co-existence of the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons.[339] Whatever the native language of the nameless writer might have been (certainly not English), (s)he clearly did not know Old Norse from Old English, because (s)he identified three evidently English words – *yongerman*, *ealderman*, and *halsefang* – as Norse. The very word *læsþegn* gets only one attestation beyond the *Constitutiones*: it comes up in another Anglo-Norman Latin translation of Anglo-Saxon laws, the *Instituta Cnuti Aliorumque Regum Anglorum* ("The Instituts of Cnut and Other Kings of the English"). Here, *læsþegn* for some reason replaced the original OE *medeme þegn* from II Cn 71:2. Why this happened is hard to tell but such morphology seems to not have been characteristic of classical Old English: only one similar formation is entered in the Bosworth–Toller's dictionary, OE *læs-boren* (lit. less-born, meaning "low-born"),[340] itself marginally rare.[341] Because the *Instituta Cnuti* were arguably written earlier than the *Constitutiones* and because their author, too, explained *læsþegn* through LAT. *mediocris homo*, there is every reason to think that the *Constitutiones*' author lifted own usage from the *Instituta Cnuti* rather than everyday parlance. In short, the *Constitutiones* are not only a highly unreliable source, but do not confer any knowledge about pre-Conquest society whatsoever, as in its ideological pursuit, it confuses language(s) and conflates realities across centuries. This fact to a large extent removes the basis for Aakjær's theorisation, for he himself emphasised the importance of the chronological concurrence of Danish Viking-Age runic inscriptions and

334 Aakjær 1927, p. 24.
335 Harris 2014, p. 135.
336 Steenstrup 1882, chap 3, §20.
337 *Gesetze* I, pp. 620–626, hereafter *Constitutiones*.
338 Wormald 1999, p. 407 (n. 661).
339 Harris 2014, pp. 132, 146.
340 Bosworth–Toller (*s.v.* "læs-boren").
341 DOEC contains only four entries.

the Anglo-Saxon evidence.[342] It must be that Aakjær was mistaken in good faith, because the Anglo-Norman provenance of the *Constitutiones* had been affirmed by Felix Liebermann more than thirty years prior to.[343] Aakjær seems to have never made note of this fact,[344] and as late as in his last contribution, printed only three weeks before his death, he still mentioned *Constitutiones* as a respectable source (though not by name).[345]

Thus, with attention to chronology and inner features as a governing principle (§1.7.2.2), nothing in the available evidence presupposes a specific juxtaposition of ON *þegn* and *drengr*. What set them aside was Aakjær's article, which must have regretfully erred in some basic premises. In truth, ON *þegn* and *drengr* belong to a wide nominal range of hyponyms for "man", which in this case functions as a hypernym (on hypo-/hypernymy, see Vignette 2). Each denotes human males, each with own contextual connotation: *bóndi* ([independent] farmer, husbandman), *sveinn* (boy, lad, [young] man), *karl* ([mature] man, husband), *rekkr* ([valiant] man = warrior), etc. Except the latter one, they appear in commemorative runic inscriptions alongside ON *þegn* and *drengr*. Without the *Constitutiones* and yeomen, any tie between *thegns* and *drengir* in this row effectively disappears (with one exception that can, however, have trivial lexical explanations – see Vignette 2), so that the Sawyers, as said, even had to reserve exceptions for these two specific lexemes. What is more, without the *Constitutiones* there remains, in effect, no reason to single out particularly ON *þegn* and *drengr* in runic memorials as supposedly somehow testimony to an Anglo-Saxon connexion. The four other specimens just listed above either got borrowed into Old English (OE *bōnda* < ON *bóndi*; OE *swegen* < ON *sveinn*) or had native cognates (ON *karl* = OE *ceorl*; ON *rekkr* = OE *rinc*), and so could have been nominated as the suggested link just as well.

2.3.2.2 place names

Since at least Jan Paul Strid's 1986 paper, neo-"Aakjærians" have pointed out sixteen (modern) Swedish place names *Tegnaby/Tägnaby/Tegneby*,[346] in which modern *-by* represents ON *býr* (alternative form: *bær*, lit. farm[house], farmstead, land estate, home)[347] and *Tegna-/Tägna-/Tegne-* is a natural development of ON *þegna*. These toponyms traditionally get situated in a row of similar formations: *Rinkeby/Rickeby/Rynkeby*, *Kar*(*le*)*by/Karlaby*, *Sven*(*n*)*eby/Sväneby* – which are understood as coined off gen. plur. of common nouns for "man" (*viz*. ON *rekka*, *karla*, *sveina*).[348] In this line of thinking, these appellatives mark 'hamlets for retinues and

342 Aakjær 1927, p. 30.
343 Liebermann 1894.
344 As a matter of fact, Aakjær never made use of Felix Liebermann's *Gesetze*, the latest edition of the *Constitutiones*. Instead, he cited Part I of Karl Rahmm's *Ethnographische Beiträge zur germanischslavischen Altertumskunde* (1905), who too wrote of the *Constitutiones* as an authentic text from King Cnut's reign. So, to be fair to Aakjær, he inherited the text's misattribution from previous scholarship. This is actually not an isolated incident in his article. At p. 11, for example, he defined ON *þegngildi* as a 'fine paid to the prince for having killed his *thegn* (a free man in the king's service)' and referenced *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* ("The Law of Eidsivathing"; *EidL* §28:2). But the actual fragment uses ON *þegngildi* as a fine payable by a lord to the king if the lord's servant violates the Lent fast. An initial suspicion of fact juggling proved incorrect: Aakjær, it turns out, copied this passage from Johan Fritzner's dictionary without checking it, which, granted, was standard practice of scholarship at the time. On the other hand, Rahmm's scepticism of Steenstrup's handling of yeomen and *drengir* found no reflection under Aakjær's pen, which may create a soothing impression of a scholarly unison on the matter.
345 Aakjær 1962.
346 A map was made available by Löfving 2001, p. 82 (figure 5).
347 Brink 1996, pp. 258–260; Jesch 2011, pp. 36–38.
348 Linde 1982, p. 68; Wadstöm 1983, pp. 63, 66–67; Franzén 1982, pp. 41–42; Wahlberg 2016, p. 55.

officials' and are derived from 'a word for retainers or some kind of military leader',[349] and so *Tegnabys* served as quarters for chieftains' *thegnly* warbands. Carl Löfving, the latest proponent of this idea, situated Västergötlandic *Tegnabys* in context of Danish political domination in the region. He maintained that for 'a maximum of a few generations' *Tegnabys* functioned as Haraldr Blátǫnn's outposts intended to control the eastern Skagerrak coast and the trade route leading east into the Mälaren valley.[350]

Isolated from modern interpretations, the distribution patterns of place names of this type are far less regular than historiography would sometimes make them. Further, their locations can be explained by more than one factor, e.g., availability of habitable and arable areas.[351] Even if *Tegnabys* in present-day Bohuslän can be shown to have aligned with commercial routes that functioned around the year 1000 AD, this fact alone does not prove they necessarily were royal garrisons. It all inevitably comes down to the interpretation of the first toponymic element.

While morphological forms from which recorded toponyms must originate are more or less securely linguistically reconstructible (thus, no question SW. *Tegnaby* < ON *Þegnabýr*), the meanings invested in them by scholars are in many instances up to negotiations. These may in fact exceed the received orthodoxy and, moreover, vary from name to name.

Pace Eric Elgqvist,[352] *Tegnabys* could theoretically contain a proper rather than common noun element after all.[353] The form *þegna-*, in fact, is a homonym for a gen. plur. of Old Norse strong masculine common *a*-stem noun *þegn* and also gen. sing. weak masculine *þegni*. In the latter case, we are dealing with a weak-form personal name < Þegn/Þiagn, well-attested in runic inscriptions,[354] for at least in Southern Scandinavia, many strong-declension personal names got a weak-declension counterpart in the medieval period. This process could just as well explain the *Karlebys* and *Svennebys* as derived from weak forms of personal masculine names Karli (< Karl)[355] and Svæini (< Sveinn);[356] in the latter case, a derivation from a hypocoristic form of a compound name (e.g., SvæingæiRR)[357] is also permissible. This supposition eliminates the implicit contradiction between runic and toponymic evidence noted by, for example, not only Strid but also Magnus Källström.[358] Even if *Karlebys* contain an appellative element, it does not have to follow that it signified a military following – *cf.* the Old English "cousin", C(h)arlton (< OE *ceorlatūn*, lit. churls' enclosure). Modern scholarship interprets these English toponyms as a result of breaking

349 Brink 1999, p. 432.
350 Löfving 2001, chaps 3:3 and 5:4. The argument had been previously developed by Duczko 1995.
351 On the Östergötlandic material, such and similar critique was put together by Rundkvist 2011, pp. 65–68.
352 Elgqvist 1947, p. 113.
353 To date, the most fundamental study of this onomastical type (off the Norwegian material) is by Schmidt 2000. On *Tegnabys*, Schmidt notices only in passing at p. 235 and adopts the traditional view of them as derived from an appellative noun.
354 Strid 1986, p. 302; Peterson 2007, p. 224. The assertion by Schmidt 2000, p. 235 (n. 194), that Þegn occurs only as a mythological name (i.e. in *Rígsþula*: below, p. 246) is in error with the runological data.
355 Peterson 2007, p. 146. Even the latest, to my knowledge, proponent of the garrisons of *thegns*, *rekkar*, *karlar*, and *sveinar* concedes a possibility of a personal name as the first element in such formations (Dobat 2011).
356 Peterson 2007, p. 213–214. Schmidt 2000, pp. 384, 520–521, cites a significant body of research that adopts this interpretation, not least because this name is well-documented in medieval times. He himself sides, though, with Hjalmar Falk's derivation of Norwegian *Svein*(*ne*)- place names from an appellative (< ON *sveinn*).
357 The name is attested in the Klemensker 3 inscription (DR 401) on the island of Bornholm (Peterson 2007, p. 213).
358 Källström 2020, pp. 84–85.

up of large land estates and settlement nucleation toward the end of the Anglo-Saxon period; they could denote functional and legal statuses of the settlements thus called, i.e. arable ploughland held in common by *ceorlas*.[359] *Rinkebys* would not conform to this pattern, however. ON *rekkr* is anything but a common word in Old Norse. It is reserved almost exclusively for poetic registers, with an exceptional alliterative complementary (suppletive) formula *rekkr ok rýgr* (lit. man and wife) in *Frostuþingslǫg* ("The Law of Frostuthing").[360] Instead of a gen. plur. of ON *rekkr*, the element *rekka-* in these toponyms could represent Old East Norse **rynka-* (ODAN. *rynkiæ*, OSW. *rynkia* < PGMC **hrunkw*[*i*]*ōn*), cognate of Old West Norse *hrukka* and dialectal NORW. *rukka* (lit. wrinkle),[361] with Old West Norse assimilation of /nk/ to geminate /kk/[β][362] and unrounding of the umlauted /y/ to /i/ in Old East Norse forms like *Rinkeby*. On this reading, *Rinkebys* probably took their names from some wrinkle-like features in post-Ice-Age sedimentary landscapes, rather than outposts garrisoned by *rekkar*.[363]

2.3.3 Summary and Implications for Ensuing Research

Upon review, decades of polemics essentially revolved around Aakjær's arguments that used to be taken for granted and as self-sufficient, with objections aimed at his comparative methodology only. The *ad fontes* source re-examination above substantiates that from the beginning, Aakjær's solution of the identity of runic *thegns* suffered from reliance on the ill-suited *Constitutiones de Foresta*. It provided a tenuous association between *thegns* and *drengir* (see VIGNETTE 2) that forced his continuers to arbitrarily divorce them from other Scandinavian "good people" in the runic corpus, and the use of *thegnly* (and *drengly*) inscriptions to circumscribe the Jelling dynasty's sphere of political influence seems to fall under the definition of the Texas sharpshooter fallacy. Besides reproducing explanatory models put forth a century ago with little room for alternative explanations, respectfully, a more general variant of the same bias, the clustering illusion, may be at work in attempts at substantiating "Aakjærian" theses with the help of toponymics. Nevertheless, despite obvious source-critical merits, Karl Martin Nielsen's opposite case, advanced by philologists since long, gained less in popular reception.

The present author eschews to maintain a total randomness in the distribution of these data points. Rather, the historiographical overview in §2.3.1 serves to raise awareness of the methodological and epistemological difficulties arising in some of the previous explanations, as well as lays foreground to a methodical re-examination in §4.3.

359 Parsons 2013, pp. 47–48, 50–52 (n. 29).
360 See the discussion by Lindow 1976, pp. 96–106.
361 Nielsen 1966, p. 318 (*s.v.* "I. rynke").
362 Bandle et al. 2002, chap XI:100, §§6.1–2; chap XI:101, §4.
363 See an early scepticism regarding the derivation of the Danish *Rynke-/Rinke-* place names from ON *rekkr* by Hald 1933. Schmidt 2000, p. 235 (n. 194) vaguely alludes to the possibility that *Rinkebys* could be derived from a rare personal name Rekkr which is nevertheless, according to him, recorded in the 1400–1500s in Jämtland (now in Sweden, but then part of Norway), at any rate significantly later than the studied period. Dobat 2011, pp. 48, 61, observes that *Rinkebys* in Denmark differ from *Karlebys* by being seaside oriented, which to my mind, at least, argues against any 'functional specialisation' and rather advises looking at topographical features, at least as a null hypothesis. It is my pleasant obligation to thank Michael Lerche Nielsen for lending me his expertise in matters of onomastics and Scandinavian toponymics.

Vignette 2. *Drengir* and *Thegns* – Connected or Not After All?

The sketch above strove to keep the narration about *thegns* separate from *drengir*. Meanwhile, Svend Aakjær's reliance on the *Constitutiones* not only made *drengir* indispensable to his thesis but also virtually inseparable from all subsequent studies of runic *thegns*. A complex question thus emerges: has the postulated connexion proved its tenability, and by extension, should *drengir* be even considered in a study dedicated to *thegns*?

From the start, "Nielsenist" literature long accepted this imposition and till the very last kept *drengir* in the discussion, despite constantly finding that it only poorly fit into the "Aakjærian" explanatory scheme. Thus, Karl Martin Nielsen himself conceded that *drengir* could have become chieftains' followers, but this was not their indispensable feature. In her earliest takes on the matter, Judith Jesch, too, admitted the connexion between runic *thegns* and *drengir* in common commemorative formulae, at the same time pointing out that both words were used differently in the skaldic and runic corpora. Martin Syrett and Lauren Goetting independently of each other went to great lengths only to find that little substantiates equating *thegns* and *drengir* with King Cnut's retainers. At a later stage and after the Danish scholar Søren Sindbæk's empirical analysis of communication and social networks in Viking-Age Scandinavia,[364] Judith Jesch for the first time disavowed any social likeness between *thegns* and *drengir* after all.

As argued in §2.3.2.1, this protracted stumbling was caused by Aakjær's reliance on Steenstrup's explanatory matrix: *drengr* = yeoman = *læspegn*. Part of it rests upon Steenstrup's honest misunderstanding of the *Constitutiones*, another part on his reversed literal understanding of designation of age in expression for the "elder people". In reality, this rather signified their social seniority, hardly physical age (below, §3.3.11.2). Thus, in truth, connecting yeomen and *drengir* seems conjectural at best. Perhaps it rose from Steenstrup's agenda of exposing the Danish influence in England (above, p. 64) and modern meaning (DAN. *dreng* literally means "boy"), paired with geographical prevalence of medieval yeomen in Eastern England.

Apart from the *Constitutiones* and Steenstrup's yeomen, one post-Conquest Old (early Middle?) English private writ (S 1243) addressed *þeines* ⁊ *drenges* (below, n. 500), and in the 12th century, this apposition in the same region occurs in at least two Pipe Rolls.[365] These facts, however, hardly support Aakjær's thesis in his stronger formulation because of a great flexibility imbued in the English *dreng*. In one of the only two pre-Conquest occurrences in Old English (the other is in the *Battle of Maldon*, l. 149, where it denotes a viking warrior), OE *dreng* got paired with "vassals" (*wassenas*) and "free men" (*hwylkun mann freo*),[366] not *thegns*. In the later medieval use, there was a great degree of terminological confusion regarding *drengs*.[367] A further note should be taken of the regional peculiarities. Of all England, it is only in the far North that OE *dreng* appears to have taken some hold as social term, but not for prominent elite but rather a type of tenant, similar to the sokemen of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and East Anglia[368] and probably akin to "radcnihts/radmenn" in Domesday Circuit 5 (below, n. 1150; see Map 7). In this capacity, *drengir* figure in *Domesday Book* in future Southern Lancashire and once in York.[369] We are clearly dealing with an individual local medieval development far removed from King Cnut's reign. Under these circumstances, the most economical explanation of the jingle *þegn–dreng* in S 1243 are the stylistic circumstances (*viz*. end rhyme, often resorted to for oral performativity's sake) and not any particular institutional likeness.

What then of even Nielsen's concession regarding ON *drengr*'s potential application to kings' retainers? Lauren Goetting introduced into the discussion an important linguistic concept of hyponymy and suggested that ON *drengr* in skaldic language was a hyponym (subtype) of ON *maðr* (lit. man) which in this case served as hypernym (supertype). Because skaldic verse due to its very nature was set in a *comitatus* social context and frequently narrated about battles, it should be expected, Goetting explained further, that *drengir* in skalds' mouths become warriors, and because skaldic poetry was generally sponsored by kings and chieftains, it is not at all surprising that *drengir* often act as kings' warriors. As regards the laudatory adjectives as a putative function of a rank in a royal

364 Sindbæk 2008, pp. 46–49.
365 MED (*s.v.* "dreng, drenğ 2").
366 S 1243 (1041×1064 AD).
367 Hollister 1962, pp. 34–37.
368 Roberts 2008.
369 *DB* I, fols. 269d, 298a (CHS R2,1–2, R3,1; YKS C3).

retinue, Goetting found that in *Íslendingasögur* ("Icelanders' sagas", also called "Family sagas"), of 137 occurrences of ON *drengr* 111 came qualified as "good", "better", or "best". So, here as well as in earlier runic inscriptions, such pairs must have been formulaic epithets to describe one's character, as simply as that.

Goetting did not delve into exploring what enabled ON *drengr*'s hyponymy with ON *maðr*. A comparison with other languages reveals that in traditional societies, lexemes denoting young men (also women, but that is presently beyond the point) often belong to a broad semantical field whose elements may easily develop social meanings in right conditions (the reverse process is also attested). Some telling examples include but are not limited to: (early) modern SW. *dräng* – "farm-hand", "servant hired for menial job"[370] from the same ON *dreng*; ORUS. *otrokъ* – lit. boy, but more specifically "servant" and also "prince's footman, retainer" (*cf.* other Slavonic cognates, including modern Czech and Slovak "slave");[371] LAT. *puer* – lit. boy, but also more narrowly "(young) servant" as in, e.g., Merovingian texts;[372] GR. παῖς (also ultimately > FR. *page* with the same sense as being discussed, but also > early Modern Irish *páiste* with a reverse semantic widening) and Arabic *ghulām* – lit. boy and boy-servant, accordingly, also used of Russian princely armed retainers in Byzantine and Arabic accounts, probably rendering ORUS. *otrok*;[373] OE *cniht* – lit. a youth/boy, but also by extension "boy-servant", sometimes armed (> MODE *knight*);[374] Middle Irish Gaelic *gilla* (modern Irish Gaelic *giolla*) and Scottish Gaelic *gille* (lit. a young man of an age to bear arms, but also "boy" and "servant"),[375] probably a borrowing of OE *cild* (> MODE *child*).[376]

The contention that "Old Danish" *drengir* started exclusively as a cohort in Scandinavian kings' retinues and acted as their local agents at home and became (part of) English local nobility upon Kings Sveinn and Cnut's conquest of 1013–1016 AD thus yields to feasibly simpler explanations. As a narrow designation of (younger) warriors in princely service, ON *drengr* rather well fits a broader tendency, and on such grounds, it would be preposterous to invariably see behind every *otrokъ*, *puer*, παῖς, or *ghulām* an agent of an early medieval monarch. Mustering the argument from the appearance of this lexeme in North-Eastern England (much later than King Cnut's reign, one may add) simply adds to the well-known Old Norse linguistic influence on regional late Old and early Middle English. As Judith Jesch remarked, 'words do mean different things at different times and in different contexts',[377] and so

> [i]t cannot be right to consider only apparently convergent usages and then fix them with a technical meaning.[378]

2.4 Conclusion

Studies on *thegnly* matters developed differently and under various stimuli in Anglo-Saxon and Nordic Viking-Age disciplines. Throughout the historiographical meta-analysis above a few things can be gathered.

First, before anything else, is the absence of a self-sufficient interest for Anglo-Saxon *thegns* as an object of study in the presence of a readily available "reference model". It has remained little contested more or less since Sharon Turner's summary thereof. Unorthodox opinions (e.g., Little and Senecal's) have so far largely gone unnoticed. Arguably, this stability owed itself to the *Compilation on Status*. As has hopefully become apparent, in spite of its appeal, the *Compilation* is ill-suited for initial guidance on factual reconstruction

370 Borenberg 2020, chap 5.
371 Kopečný 1966, – although *cf.* attempts to connect Slavonic *otrokъ* with ON *þræll*: Brink 2021, pp. 137–138.
372 Green 1965, pp. 101–104 *et passim*.
373 Shchavelev 2017, pp. 96–100.
374 Coss 2003, p. 30.
375 Dinneen 1927, p. 536 (*s.v.* "giolla); Quin 1955, Vol. G, p. 82 (*s.v.* "gilla").
376 MacBain 1911, p. 194 (*s.v.* "gille").
377 Jesch 2011, p. 41.
378 Reynolds 1997, p. 223.

of Anglo-Saxon social lay elites. Felix Liebermann's well-meant but unintentionally unhelpful momentous decision to include the *Compilation*, uncontextualised and unattributed at the time, in his state-of-the-art legal compendium alongside other Anglo-Saxon legal authorities endorsed the *Compilation*'s fallacious credibility. Historians were thereby inadvertently offered a poisoned chalice with the Archbishop's "grand theory" and its soothing comprehensiveness and seductively clear-cut definitions.

Second, Nordic and Anglo–American historiographies converge in that runic *thegns* rarely became an object of study for their own sake. Even "Nielsenist" critique has largely been a reaction as opposed to a genuine interest in *thegns* in and of themselves. Aakjær's note of the parallel circulation of OE/ON *þegn* would not have drawn so much attention, had runic *thegns* not seemingly fit in "grand narratives" of political consolidation. At the same time, scholarship reveals a deficit in critical re-examination of his initial source work. when checked, it fails some important tests of scrutiny (even of its own time). Neither did the Anglo-Saxon "reference model" that Aakjær expectedly relied on figure in the century-long polemics in the discussion of runic *thegns*.

That being said, there are two interconnected neo-"Aakjærian" observations that cannot be easily dismissed. This becomes especially apparent if research QUESTION 3 and trans-North-Sea interactions, exemplified by *thegnly* phenomena and discussed in §5.3, are to be engaged. Runic *thegns* did indeed appear at a time of intensive Anglo–Scandinavian contacts and in a region ruler/influences by a political force that initiated these contacts. It is these reasons that, despite the critique above, merit a thorough study of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic *thegns* in the two following chapters.

Excursus 1
Etymology of *Þegn*: "Retainer" or "Child"?

In Anglo-Saxon studies, the etymology of OE *þegn* never played a role worth noting *per se*.[379] Contrarily, the "Aakjærian–Nielsenist" polemics resorted to it as an argument here and there.[380] It is thus worthwhile to briefly overview its force and premise.

From early on, linguists entertained a connexion between OE/ON *þegn* (cognate to OHG *degan* [> GER. *Degen*] and OS *thegan*) and GR. τέκνον (lit. child), all putatively suffixed *-no-* formations from PIE **teq-/tek-* (suggested meaning: to give birth to, beget). The latter's etymology was probably spelt out in full by George Liddell (1811–1898) and Robert Scott (1811–1887): GR. τέκνον < τεκεῖν (aorist infinitive) < τίκτω (1st person sing. of present infinitive τίκτειν, lit. to give birth to) < *TEK.[381] The two elaborated upon preceding German works by Franz Passow (1786–1833) and Johann Schneider (1750–1822), but the etymology τέκνον < *TEK was probably their novelty.

The connexion was at first doubted. Just three years before Liddell and Scott, the German scholar Eberhard Graff (1780–1841) stated in passing on OHG *degan*, that "τέκνον is likely not to be compared".[382] Judging by this phrase, such comparisons could have been proposed earlier, but in the manner of his time and like Liddell and Scott, Graff did not mention concrete authors. Despite his warning, the Grimm brothers did exactly that. Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859), also in passing, unreservedly noted that GER. *Degen* "corresponds to τέκνον, which is related to τίκτω".[383] Thereafter this etymology gradually won favour among linguists and dictionary makers (Guðbrandur Vigfússon, Alf Torp, Alexander Jóhannesson, Julius Pokorny, Vladimir Orel). Only Walter Skeat (1835–1912), it would appear, still allowed uncertainty in the second edition of his etymological dictionary and wavered between OE *þegn* < *þigen* < (*þēon* <) **þīhan* (lit. to grow up, be strong, avail) and 'even a simpler solution' by August Flick (OE *þegn* < GR. τέκνον).[384]

The Dutch linguist Guus Kroonen recently advanced arguments to refute the traditional etymology. Key to his point is the advocacy of Kluge's law:

1. Had the *first* syllable been stressed (barytonic stress, **ték-no-*), under Grimm's law the PIE voiceless plosive /*k/ ought to have yielded the PGMC velar fricative /*χ/ (cf. PGMC **hertan* and LAT. *cor*; OE *wealh* and LAT. *Volca*, etc.), thus producing an

379 Although it used to be sometimes mentioned in earlier works, e.g., Larson 1904, p. 89; Loyn 1955, p. 540.

380 E.g., Aakjær 1927, pp. 18–19; Lindow 1976, p. 107; Goetting 2006, p. 378. *Cf.* Green 1965, p. 103. Aakjær's reconstruction can be visualised as follows: (1) "child" => (2) "boy/young man" => (3) "servant/retainer" => (4) "warrior, member of a *comitatus*" => (5) "attendant nobility" => (6) "knights and barons" => (7) "noble, chivalrous, courageous person".

381 Liddell and Scott 1846, pp. 1476 (*s.v.* "τέκνον"), 1497 (*s.v.* "τίκτω"). In the present book, the 1846 (American) edition was consulted. The first imprint came out three years prior to, but unfortunately it was not available at the time this text was written. However, it appears that this etymology had been established already in 1843 and was reproduced in 1846 without further alterations.

382 '…τέκνον ist wohl nicht zu vergleichen' (Graff 1840, V, p. 119 [*s.v.* "DEGAN"]).

383 '…ihm entspricht τέκνον, das sich zu τίκτω verhält' (Grimm and Grimm 1860, II, p. 895 [*s.v.* "DEGEN"]).

384 Skeat 1888, p. 634 (*s.v.* "THANE"). In the first edition, Skeat reproduced Grimm's etymology without elaborations. Skeat's suggestion did not receive any wide circulation. Only Little 1889, p. 724 (and the author was himself not a linguist), reproduced it but still assumed OE *þegn* to have come from 'the boy or young man'.

otherwise non-attested ***þehna-*.[385] However, the well-known addition to this rule, Verner's law, explains that PGMC /*χ/ becomes the voiced spirant /*ɣ/ if preceded by a non-accentuated syllable (*cf.* LAT. *juvencus* and OE *geong*). Therefore, we might expect an according stress here as well.

2. Yet had the *second* syllable been stressed (oxytonic stress, **tek-nó*), under Kluge's law the /*n/ in the PIE suffix should have assimilated the preceding plosive consonant (*cf.* PGMC **þakkōn-*, **likkōn-* and LAT. *tango*, *lingo*, etc.): thus, PIE **tek-nó-* > PGMC ***þekka-*, a form equally unattested.

Because both ***þehna-* and ***þekka-* are absent, the etymology OE/ON *þegn* < PIE **tek-* must be rejected, argues Kroonen. Instead, he derives OE/ON *þegn* from PGMC **þegjan* (suggested meaning: to request),[386] whence ON *þiggja* and OE *þicgan* (lit. to receive, accept), OS *thiggian*, OHG *dicken/digen*, and MHG *digen* (lit. to ask, beg, endure), and other cognates in Celtic languages. Kroonen suggests that,

> Both in Germanic and the other IE branches, the original meaning seems to have been "to reach out the hand" [...], whence both "to request" and "to accept".[387]

Hence, in Kroonen's line of thinking, OE/ON *þegn* never meant "child" or "young man" and was a native Germanic formation that from the start denoted a "retainer", i.e. one who requests and accepts patronage and protection in exchange for service.

Kroonen's etymology has caveats.[388] For one, barytonic stress in such formations as discussed is an exclusive feature of Greek, where it is only represented by scattered forms that do not make up a systematic morphological type. Conversely, Sanskrit, where *-nó-* formations are well-represented, testifies to oxytonic stress (e.g., *bhinnáh*, lit. having been cut < *bhid*, lit. to cut). Then, for the other, Kroonen's argumentation hinges on Kluge's law. Despite many examples of regular transitions, collected and explained by him in his doctoral thesis as well as by others, at present linguists still debate Kluge's law. To convince critics, further verification and a detailed individual analysis of morphology of examples brought out by him can be required.

Against it, to my mind, Kroonen's solution sits well with historical record. The chronologically earliest attestation of the word under discussion belongs to Old English. King Ine's West Saxon laws, and influenced by them King Wihtred's Kentish laws (both from the 690s), used "king's *thegn*" in a sense that will last through all Old English period: a servant of a ruler, a commended liegeman (below, §3.3.3).[389] The contemporaneous *Épinal-Erfurt*

385 It must be remarked that at least three Swedish runic inscriptions contain spellings with an *h* in ON *þegn*: **þahn** (ᚦᚨᚼᚾ) in Vg 157, Vg 158 and **þihna** (ᚦᛁᚼᚾᚨ) in Sm 35. However, as pointed out by Seán Vrieland (private correspondence, 28 December 2017) the younger futhark rune ᚼ can frequently stand for the spirant /ɣ/ (so that we find *dahr* instead of *dagr*, and so forth). Additionally, 'a Proto-Germanic ***þehna-* would not yield runic *h*, because Proto-Germanic **h* is lost in North (and West) Germanic when not word-initial. Thus, a form ***þehna-* would yield Old Norse ***þén*'.

386 Torp 1909, p. 178, made a similar assumption almost a century prior to Kroonen but left it unresolved and showed more favour towards the traditional etymology.

387 Kroonen 2013, p. 536 (*s.v.* "*þegna-").

388 My sincerest gratitude to Alexander Mankov, a professional linguist unlike myself, for guiding me throughout this paragraph.

389 *Burgbryce mon sceal betan CXX scill. Kyninges ꝛ biscepes, þær his rice bið; ealdormonnes LXXX scill.; cyninges ðegnes LX scill.; gesiðcundes monnes landhæbbendes XXXV* [*scll'*]; *ꝛ bi ðon ansacan* ('120 shillings compensation shall be paid for breaking into the fortified premises of the king or [those of] a bishop within his sphere of jurisdiction; [for breaking into those] of an *ealdorman* 80 shillings; into those of a king's thegn 60 shillings; into those of a nobleman who holds land 35 shillings. The accusation may be denied by oaths corresponding to

Glossary (possibly compiled for the Anglo-Saxon poet and scholar Aldhelm [d. 709 AD]) used *thegn/degn* as a lemma for early medieval sing. acc. LAT. *adsaeculam/adsexulum*[390] (classical LAT. *assecula*, lit. follower, servant in a non-pejorative sense).[391]

It must be noted that semantical transitions from "child" to "retainer, servant" are not exclusively rare in medieval languages, although the examples collected in VIGNETTE 2 narrow the "child" down to "boy", whereas Liddell and Scott specify that GR. τέκνον can be used irrespective of 'whether son or daughter'. It depends if this technicality should subtract arguments from the traditional etymology or not. At any rate, Kroonen's happy marriage between linguistics and history is, plainly, simpler and calls for fewer otherwise unattested hypothetical transitions (*cf.* above, n. 380).

As of now, the verdict on the etymology of OE/ON *þegn* is still uncertain. It remains unclear if a *thegn*'s subordination to a principal had initially been conceptualised on the analogy of paternalistic familial relationships, or if it always belonged rather to the sphere of lordship and clientship. But as historical records show, words tend to evolve and assume new meanings (also social) far removed from their origins. Ultimately, in a historical research, etymology adds valuable nuance – and it will be especially recalled in §5.3 – but must anyway rank as a secondary support of lesser weight for the overall argument.

these amounts'; Ine 45, p. 108); *Gest hine clænsie sylfes aþe on wiofode; swylce cyninges ðegn* ('A stranger shall clear himself by his own oath, at the altar. A king's thegn [shall clear himself] in the same way'; Wi 20, p. 14).

390 Épinal-Erfurt Glossary, l. 101.

391 Lewis and Short 1879, p. 177 (*s.v.* "assĕcla"); Niermeyer 2002, I, p. 84 (*s.v.* "assecula").

Chapter 3
Thegn in England: The Word and the People

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to trace the trajectory of *thegn* as a social phenomenon(-a) in late Anglo-Saxon England. At its simplest, the chapter concludes with one of the feasible answers to the question, "who was an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*?" To this end, the historical linguistic half in §3.3 corresponds to the *first stage* of research and will offer a semasiological inquiry into the lexicography of the OE *þegn* to chart its most discrete meanings in context and time and thereby address research Question 1 regarding the reflection of Anglo-Saxon social structures in language from this one example. A deviation for the opposite, onomasiological method will be allowed only in §3.3.11. It will highlight how OE *þegn* built on pre-existing lexical expressions of the idea of a social elite and acquired synonymous qualities with other Old English nouns in such fixed collocations. The historical-sociological half in §3.4 will then attempt to discern the social context(s) of this lexeme as it was diffracted in extant sources. It shall address research Question 2 by assessing, to which extent, how, why, and when Anglo-Saxon *thegns* became/were a social-historical phenomenon and/or a social concept and what its key features were. With the plethora of available contemporaneous Old English (and to a lesser extent, also Latin) texts, the section will digress to a onomasiological take on the matter only in §§3.4.4.3–7, where it will be argued that the type of landed property explicitly verbally associated with *thegns* – bookland – could practically pass under various names. The chapter will argue that the social dimension of OE *þegn* developed under a strong impetus of the royalist discourse, and it shall further substantiate the hard to gauge internalisation of a monarchocentric *thegnly* identity by actual individuals. Bearing in mind both this tentative association between it and bookland and in view of many other occurrences of OE *þegn* in social contexts, §3.4 will ultimately eschew an onomasiological study of all Anglo-Saxon aristocratic landed elites for their own sake.[392] It is also necessary to specify that, as mentioned in §1.7.1, while the second half will concentrate on texts that describe actual social conditions of late Anglo-Saxon England as representative, the former half will also include them but for lexicographical purposes only.

3.2 Sources and Applied Methodology

3.2.1 Overview of Sources

Old English is one of the best documented Germanic languages of the first millennium AD.[393] Defining the chronological boundaries of written Old English is a matter of some perplexity. Whilst *c.* 600 AD offers little ground for debate as the earliest the available continuous

392 Mass studies in this vein have been undertaken by other scholars, e.g., Senecal 1999; Baxter and Lewis 2017.

393 Gneuss 2013, p. 22.

written sources extend to,[394] the upper demarcation line between (late) Old English and (early) Middle English is unsurprisingly blurred. Modern scholarship divorces it from the date of the Norman Conquest, rightly pointing out that the Old English literary tradition did not cease overnight; that in fact 12th-century manuscripts carried it on;[395] that some of the processes characteristic of Middle English (such as simplification of the inflective system) had begun before; and that significant lexical effects of Norman French and Latin are most observable after *c.* 1200 AD.[396] Be that as it may, classical Old English as a *Schriftsprache* as it formed after *c.* 950 AD in the Winchester school[397] was, without doubt, steadily becoming unintelligible to English speakers towards the close of the 12th century. At this time, new copies of Old English texts 'start being produced with a greater degree of rewriting into more contemporary forms of English' and 'pre-Conquest English was gradually becoming "Old" English'.[398] For these reasons, this book concurs with the compilers of the DOE Web Corpus in their upper cut-off line for Old English at *c.* 1150 AD, represented by the final annal in the Peterborough manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 1154 AD.

Appendix 3.1 contains the initital raw data on which the present chapter builds. The multitude of sources containing OE *þegn*, indexed in the DOE Web Corpus, can be approached and organised in various ways. In the course of the study, it appeared reasonable enough to typify, categorise, and classify the texts that appear in Appendix 3.1 thus:

- At the highest level, texts were assessed according to their *format*, which in this case were three: prose, poetry, gloss.
- Next, poetic and prose texts were *typologised* into secular and religious. This operation turned out redundant for glosses, as all relevant ones were to religious material only.
- Texts were then treated as specimens of various *genres* that seemed best descriptive of their contents (e.g., homiletic prose, epistolary, documentary, etc.). This, granted, is the most arbitrary division in the proposed hierarchy and can be open to criticism. This division led to separating 24 genres.
- Finally, because "source" can be understood in rather broad way, individual *elements* were introduced as the final category. In some instances, this was only a matter of convenience (e.g., singling out book I in the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* ("The Ecclesiastical History of the English People") can be seen as preferential) but in others the very nature of sources at hand necessitated such a division. This applied first and foremost to the documentary genres, in which, for instance, the source "royal diplomas" contained dozens of separate items.

Upon completion, the source data base included 579 individual elements of 113 unique sources. Their chronological distribution largely follows the general chronology of Old English texts. Texts before *c.* 875 AD are relatively few and of limited variation[399] and

394 Drawn at the approximate date of the Laws of Æthelberht. Though preserved only in the *Textus Roffensis*, scholarly consensus has this redaction reflecting an actual 7th-century text as it was composed sometime in 601×604/609 AD (see arguments collected by Hough 2015). Old English had been written in runes as early as the 5th century. Some scholars separate this stage as "Pre-Old English" to contrast it with the form the language took in Latin script (see, e.g., Waxenberger 2013, pp. 17–64).

395 Swan and Treharne 2000; Conti 2007; Swan 2007.

396 Lutz 2002.

397 Gneuss 1972; Hofstetter 1988. Further studies are listed by, e.g., Lund 2023, p. 54 (n. 1).

398 Jones 2013, p. 315.

399 This state of affairs does not necessarily reflect the actual underdevelopment of the Old English literary

include only some 31 elements. The last quarter of the 9th century is the first peak of Old English literary production under the auspices of King Alfred and his circle in the context of their programme of intellectual revival.[400] Not all of the texts produced in these years were always sponsored or ordered by the royal court, though. Together they account for a maximum of another 37 elements, although eight of them are from the Vercelli homilies, which cannot be dated precisely and thus may well belong to a later period.[401] The vast majority of occurrences of OE *þegn* come from after the Benedictine reform (the second half of the 10th century) and are concentrated in the second peak of Anglo-Saxon literary production in the decades around the turn of the millenium. This is the time when two of the most prolific known Anglo-Saxon *hommes de lettres* were active: Archbishop Wulfstan and his famous contemporary and correspondent, Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham (d. *c.* 1010), who alone penned almost 15% of the surviving Old English corpus.[402] Around the same time, the flow of Anglo-Saxon vernacular documentation becomes much steadier[403] and rapidly expands in the eleventh century, though this might have to do with the modes of preservation rather than production (discussed in §3.2.1.1, below). In any case, it has been plausibly conjectured that the increase of use of Old English in documentary genres was likely spurred by the Alfredian project.[404] Compared to these two peaks, the years between them saw a relatively patchy textual coverage.

In terms of typology, the distribution of the relevant source elements is anything but even. The documentary genre alone accounts for almost half of them (272, to be exact), yet the number of occurrences of OE *þegn* in them is proportionally much smaller (302 out of about two thousand). Moreover, the range of their contextual uses is rather limited, because 103 elements are in royal diplomas and 134 in royal writs, both sources with a remarkably stable use of OE *þegn*. Conversely, almost a quarter of all occurrences (508) belong to a mere 13 elements within just two sources, the vernacular glosses in the Lindisfarne and Rushworth (also known as Macregol) Gospels, both from the second half of the 10th century and also extremely consistent in their use of OE *þegn*.

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tradition but rather testifies to the potential losses in its earliest stages (see further Bately 1988; Scragg 2013, p. 52).

400 King Alfred and his intellectual milieu have been the object of many studies (see a summary by Jayatilaka 2012) that are too many to list down here. Some general works on the Alfredian literary production include, among others, Reuter 2003, chaps 6–8; Pratt 2007, chaps 7–14; Discenza and Szarmach 2015, chaps 4–13. One of the most hotly debated problems has been Alfred's authorship of some of the then produced texts, which for our purposes is largely immaterial, since the use of OE *þegn* is for the most part consistent in the prose of the time. When referring to Alfredian texts below, a "collective Alfred" will be implied.

401 Scragg 1992, p. xxxix. The manuscript (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS CXVII) was written in the late 10th century but without doubt copied earlier texts. See a codicological study by Lucas 2011.

402 Wilcox 2005, p. 53 (n. 3). Scholarship on Wulfstan and Ælfric separately, their relationships, and how they compare as authors is voluminous. Some of the latest publications on the two include: Godden 2004; Stanley 2004; Keynes 2007. Scholarship on Ælfric alone is even greater. Interested readers can find an overview to the state of the art at the end of the 2000s by Magennis and Swan 2009, and a concise introduction to his literary legacy by Amodio 2014, pp. 116–134.

403 The late Anglo-Saxon period as defined above accommodates all royal and private writs (113 and 9 accordingly), 54 out of 58 wills and bequests, 30 out of 61 lay donations, 10 out 15 clerical donations, 134 out of 166 donations by bishops, and 49 out of 71 miscellaneous documents that fall outside this categorisation (agreements, records of disputes, various lists, etc.) and the overwhelming majority gravitates towards the end of the period (Sukhino-Khomenko 2022, pp. 191–192 [n. 32]).

404 McKitterick 1990, chaps 2, 9. For the scholarship on Anglo-Saxon vernacular literacy and use of Old English in documentation, see, e.g., Lowe 1998; 2021, and many other works by the last-cited author.

When addressing the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, these considerations bear importance, for they crucially condition the proposed answer. For one, they severely limit any reasoning concerning "more ubiquitous" and "more peripheral" meanings of OE *þegn*, as long as such reasoning is based on these rather misleading raw numerical data. For the other, available sources contain unfortunate gaps in their chronological coverage: the pre-history of late Anglo-Saxon *thegn* is only fragmentary, as is the transformative middle of the 10th century. Luckily, the period to which, on the opposite coast of the North Sea, almost all *thegnly* runic inscriptions belong coincided with a significant Old English textual production, which sets this study on a stabler footing.

Three sources from the overall mass will be of particularly importance in §3.4: Anglo-Saxon documentary texts (charters and diplomas), legislation, and *Domesday Book*. A brief methodological discussion of their idiosyncrasies will facilitate a qualified use of these sources, otherwise fraught with complexities in each case.

3.2.1.1 Anglo-Saxon charters[405]

The Anglo-Saxon diplomatic tradition originated in the 7th century to meet the needs of the Church to perpetuate its being endowed by newly-converted kings and princes. The earliest but also numerically most prevalent type among pre-Norman English documentation are thus Latin royal diplomas (1051 items)[406] that functioned as title-deeds to land. Alternatively, early grants could include a lay person as an intermediary, but, to believe their own testimonies, were ultimately intended for ecclesiastical benefaction.[407] As far as our record goes, the first diploma to unequivocally state that the object of donation was purely secular is S 114 (779 AD), but the praxis seems earlier.[408] Relatively soon after, a vernacular strand branched off,[409] although the sustained losses to the surviving corpus may be significantly distorting our knowledge and understanding of this process and its dynamics.

Henceforth, Old English found use in land boundaries within the main text in royal Latin diplomas; non-royal grants (ecclesiastical and lay), including lease contracts; records of private – such as marriage agreements, for instance, – and communal matters, – for example, litigations; bequests; royal (and, inspired by them, private) writs. This latter category proved a much more versatile tool of royal governance than diplomas had been. A writ used to be a condensed notification addressed to a local shire community, always called "king's *thegns*", about a king's decisions that had bearing on that community. A discussion has long revolved around the origins of royal writs as a documentary form in their known finished material guise – narrow strips of parchment with a pendant two-face seal and a relatively short message. It is important to the argument in this chapter that

405 This section is based on my previous article in co-authorship with Dr Timofey Guimon (Sukhino-Khomenko and Guimon 2022, pp. 48–61, 69–104, 129–144), as well as my own take on the problem of representation by means of statistical analysis (Sukhino-Khomenko 2022), so I allowed myself to economise on footnotes and references in the abbreviated version below.

406 Plus two abnormalities in vernacular of tenable authenticity.

407 E.g., land was donated *ad construendum monasterium* ("for construction of a monastery") in S 46 (733×747 × *c.* 765 AD) and S 48 (762 instead of 765 AD) disposed of *terram ad construendum in ea monasterium* ("land for a monastery to be constructed on it"). A fuller list of similar instances was collected by Abels 1988, p. 224 (n. 22).

408 S 57 (756 instead of 777×779 AD; problematic status, document presently lost), 58 (768 AD), 63 (757×774 AD; authenticity imperfect).

409 S 1188 (the first transaction in 798×810 AD, the second in 805×832 AD).

royal documentation was one of the crucial mechanisms of disseminating monarchocentric discourse that featured OE *þegn*. For this argument, however, the date when the first writs conforming to the preserved physical originals began circulation is of lesser import than the fairly good chance that local communities had been well-acquainted with being addressed as "kings' *thegns*" even before then.[410] All extant Anglo-Saxon documentation was preserved exclusively in the archives of religious communities[411] for whom documents had been intended in the first place or who somehow became interested in matters of their contents. Upon the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536–1541, these collections were scattered, with sad losses along the way to modern editions in addition to those previously accrued already across the Middle Ages, ever more so in respect of vernacular documents that were of far less interest to Anglo-Norman administrators.[412] As of 2011, 294 items were known from parchment single sheets of parchment prior to 1100 AD, and the rest only in later medieval cartulary copies.

The corpus was first fully catalogued by Peter Sawyer in 1968. Since then, sixty texts (designated by letters "a–f" in the updated list) have been either re-discovered or given the status of separate document, so that the present total number of known charters is 1,937[413] (272 of which are lost or incomplete). About half have been edited in an ongoing series published by the British Academy and Royal Historical Society (the BACS series, for short), each volume in which includes pre-Conquest documents from a given archive (occasionally, more than one, too). In 2010, a revisited corpus was publicly released online under the name *The Electronic Sawyer*. In the same year, the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (PASE, for short) saw the launch. PASE is a digital database of all individual inhabitants of England in this period known by name. In sections where the raw data were charters, PASE is integrated with *The Electronic Sawyer*.

410 Dr Guimon and I discussed this elsewhere (Sukhino-Khomenko and Guimon 2022, pp. 135–144), but in a nutshell, positions for earlier (at least by King Alfred's reign) and later (shortly before the first extant seven physical specimens) dates were consolidated by Harmer 1989, pp. 3, 10–13, and Barraclough 1954, respectively. The two earliest writs purport to have been issued by King Æthelred, but the evidence is inconclusive. S 945 (978×1016 AD; *Writs* 52) raises less suspicion but has been preserved only in a 17th-century copy that claims to have copied an "ancient roll from St Pauls [London]". S 946 (984×1001 AD; *Writs* 107) is likely a forgery. A middle ground invites itself on concession that 11th-century writs were an amalgam of pre-existing elements: lexical (such as formulae: Timofeeva 2019, pp. 57–60), physical (such as seals as visual authentication tokens for royal envoys: Fenton 2020, pp. 130–136), and governmental (such as routine dispatch of royal written communication). For example, in S 1456, King Æthelred sent his "writ and seal" to the Archbishop of Canterbury with an order to settle a land dispute; on a similar occasion, in S 1454 the same king sent only his seal; Ælfric compared a Christian negligent of his/her preachers to a king's *thegn* who ignores the king's writ (*SH* II.20, p. 659 [ll. 406–410]; the syntax or lexis in this bit is confused; see comments and suggested solutions by Keynes 1980, p. 137).

411 Only three documents veer off this pattern: S 454 (924×939 AD) was preserved in Malmesbury borough but is a patent later medieval forgery; two out of three copies of S 1103 (1042×1044 AD) have been made in 15th-century letter books of the Corporation of London; the unique S 1243 is a chance survival in the Lowther family castle (Westmorland).

412 The 12th-century Latin endorsement in the *Fonthill Letter* (S 1445 [899×924 AD]; *SEHD* 18) – *inutile* (lit. useless) – is a most vivid case in point: written in Old English, the letter concerned land estates in the Winchester diocese's sphere of interests, not that of Canterbury in whose archive the letter got preserved. The *Fonthill Letter* is discussed at length below, §3.4.4.6.

413 Six of them are currently lacking from *The Electronic Sawyer*: S 314 (855 AD), 322 (884 AD), 539 (948 AD), 1451 (972–978 AD), 1541 (bounds, re-occur in S 934 [1015 AD]), and 1815 (959×975 AD). Note a minor inaccuracy in Sukhino-Khomenko 2022, p. 185, where the number of known texts was given as 1,675 (rather than 1,662): this discrepancy is due to the then chosen method of calculation – mechanic summation of numbers provided for each individual archive – that did not account for the few documents occurring in copies in more than one archive.

From the start, Anglo-Saxon solemn documents were drafted by and for ecclesiastics and, though written in the name of kings, thus threatened transgressors with only spiritual sanctions and lacked any authentication tokens except for schedules of witnesses: royal relatives, top clergy, high(er) officials, and – crucially for the present study – lower-level attendants, commonly associated with *thegns*. As regards the latter category, in certain documentary items official capacities can be lacking before/after the name, depending on the template used or later cartulary abbreviation, and the fact that some names belong to the same individuals is harder to establish. However, these lists, judging from single-sheet originals, were not autographs. Neither were crosses next to the names on these lists. These conventions remained fixed into the 10th century when, modern research shows, the Cerdicings' chanceries took over the production of new royal diplomas. Accordingly, they were particularly susceptible to medieval counterfeiting and tampering that caused Timothy Reuter's oft-quoted sardonic remark that,

> [...] Anglo-Saxon diplomaticists persist in the belief that it is possible to be slightly dead or partly pregnant, and discussion of royal titles is made much more difficult when there is a subtly graduated range of conditions [...]: genuine, interpolated, forgery on the basis of a genuine charter, contemporary forgery, later forgery.[414]

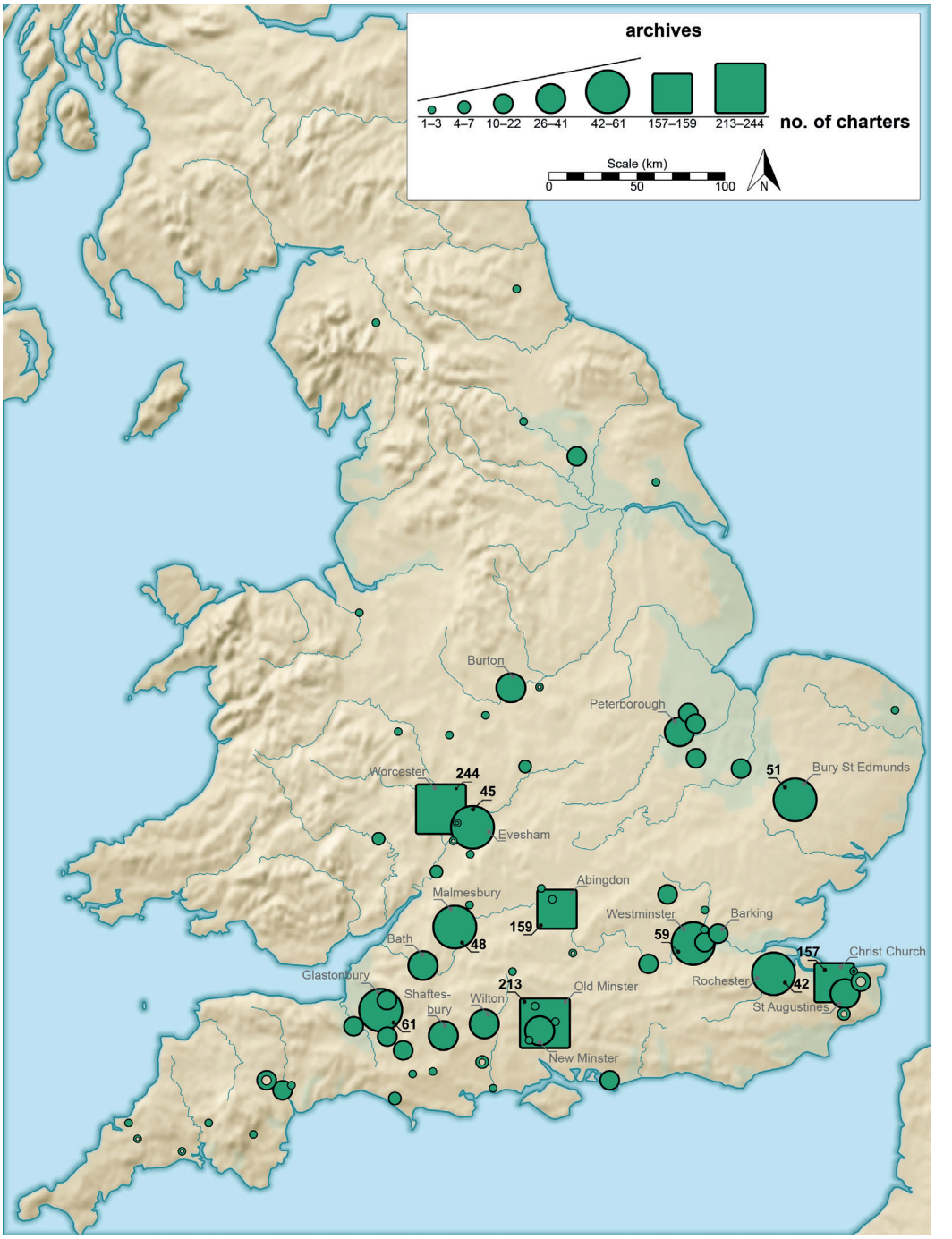
Reuter's derision aside, this book follows the verdicts of the BACS editors; whenever a document stemmed from an archive not yet published in BACS, the sum of scholarly opinions provided in *The Electronic Sawyer* guided the assessment.

The other problem to consider is that of representativeness. It is impossible to know which once-produced amount of documents stands behind the extant corpus, and the triangle land–document–archive of preservation turns out more than just intuitive when respective numbers are put together. Figuratively speaking, Anglo-Saxon archives are best thought of as documentary gravity wells that, for reasons outside our current concerns, predominantly concentrated in "Greater" Wessex (Map 5). The (re-)establishment of new ecclesiastic foundations (first of all, in the previously archiveless "Danelaw") does not seem to have radically altered documentary preservation rates, at least as far as royal diplomas of 871–1066 AD are concerned. For the latter category and the donations recorded therein, some helpful cross-check comes from *Domesday Book*. A collation between them and the distribution of Domesday royal monetary income[415] indicates a general geographical overlap when measured using Pearson's correlation coefficients and controlled with various linear regression models based on Domesday data. Causal relationships can only be inferred, but the models make most mathematical and historical sense on assumption that royal donation policy tended to hinge on the spatial arrangement of royal resources,[416] which even in 1066 AD largely remained in "Greater" Wessex. But even with this apparent historical skew, its overlap with overall archival geography (compare Map 5 and Map 6) hampers

414 Reuter 2006, p. 297.

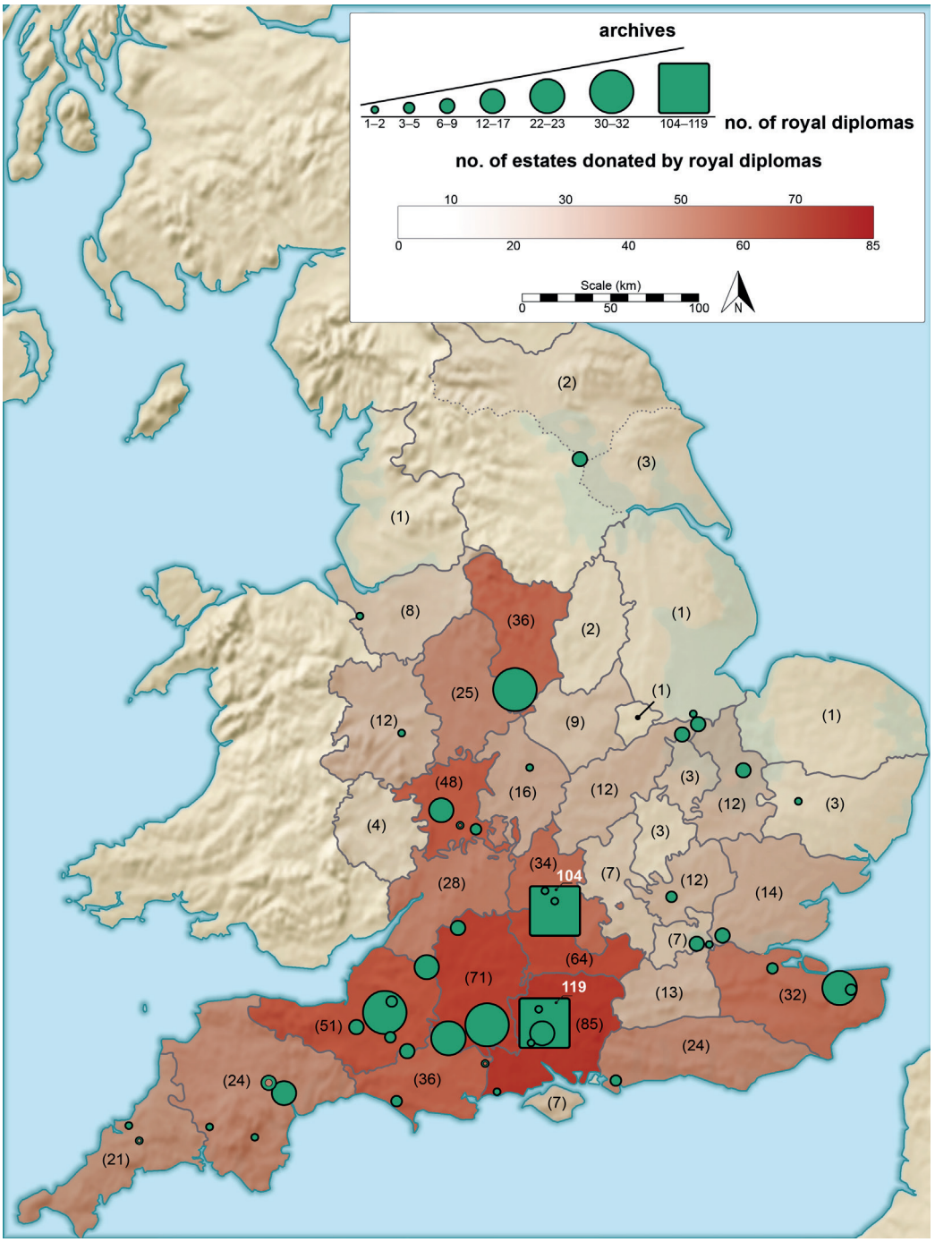
415 The *valet/valuit* (lit. is/was worth) parameter in the original Domesday text. What exactly it represented has been a subject of many inquiries. For the purposes of this study, the interpretation by Steven Baxter and Chris Lewis was followed. They take the "value" of land 'as the total income that each manor was expected to generate for its lord in a given year' (Baxter and Lewis 2017, p. 364).

416 Which is, of course, not to claim that solely the king's monetary income known from *Domesday Book* determined it – the word "model" and its explanatory merits are crucial here. Royal revenues were generated more than just by landed property alone, and 'without a tenth-century Domesday Book, our knowledge of the lands and other interests of even the greatest magnates will always be extremely incomplete' (Molyneaux 2015, p. 50).



Map 5. Archival concentration of Anglo-Saxon charters (all types for the whole pre-Conquest period, all types of authenticity). Hollow dots mark inactive archives whose funds had been subsumed already by 1066 AD

our ability to exhaustively study *thegns* kingdom-wide and especially east of the provisional line from the Wirral peninsula to the Thames estuary and even more so north of a similar line between the Wirral and the Wash. As for non-royal documentation, we often cannot tell if we lack data on account of their absence from the start or of survival bias. Nor can it be known, for instance, if the *thegns* from the *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge*



Map 6. Archival concentration of Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas (authentic and likely authentic only), 871–1066 AD, and heatmap of geographical concentration of land estates donated via these diplomas (numbers in the brackets). Hollow dots mark inactive archives whose funds had been subsumed already by 1066 AD

were a splinter of a far wider historical ontology in Eastern England or whether this was a peculiar language of a peculiar document that survived by chance.

3.2.1.2 Anglo-Saxon legislation

Thegns figure 70 times in secular Anglo-Saxon legislation: 45 in royal law-codes and 25 in non-royal pieces.[417] Despite the laws' normative appeal, 'it's important not to mistake text for practices',[418] all the more so because despite the seeming proliferation of non-royal written Anglo-Saxon laws, such laws were effectively impossible without royal precedent.[419]

It is presently acknowledged that Anglo-Saxon royal legislation, whose 10th-century instalments overtly resemble Frankish capitularies, belonged to a wider post-Roman legal culture, and so discussion has to start in Merovingian and Carolingian Francia. Scholarship long avoided the subject of the relation between early medieval written law (LAT. *lex scripta*) and actual legal praxis. The shared consensus across the board used to be that, for one, the written law of post-Roman successor kingdoms was designed to address the needs of courts, and for the other, that this customary law was "primitive", and hence so were the societies it governed.

A turn-around began with a two-part 1947 article by the Jewish historian Simon Stein (1887 – after 1948).[420] In polemics against the German school of historical jurisprudence, Stein postulated that the earliest Frankish law, *Lex Salica* ("The Salian Law"),[421] was a "fake" in the sense that it had never been officially promulgated by any king and instead was allegedly compiled by Archbishop of Reims Hincmar (in office 845–882). In reaction, Karl August Eckhardt (1901–1979) prepared a new critical edition that substantiated the existence of early and unpreserved manuscripts of *Lex Salica*,[422] but not whether they were actually used in the courtroom. In 1957, the Belgian medievalist François Louis Ganshof (1895–1980) concluded that Carolingian capitularies had only marginal practical significance and surmised the prevalence of oral methods in administrative practices (LAT. *verbum regis*).[423] Two decades later his German colleague Hermann Nehlsen (1936–2021) denied *Lex Salica* any practical application whatsoever and explained literal mentions of LAT. *lex salica* as notions of "the right law" in general. He pointed out its legal inconsistencies, textual and scribal errors that rendered whole clauses odd, silence on urgent daily matters, lack of direct references to or citations from in other texts, as well as non-Latinate officials' illiteracy.[424]

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417 Note my inaccuracy in Sukhino-Khomenko 2018b, p. 40 (table 6), where the number given was 58.

418 One of Dr Andrew Rabin's methodological warnings in his presentation at the 56th international Congress on Medieval Studies (Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, 14 May 2021).

419 Of the 25 mentions in formally private legal pieces, 9 (Geþyncðo 1–7, pp. 456–458; Að 1–2, p. 464; Grið 21:2, p. 472) were in Wulfstan's by universal recognition; 4 (Norðleod 5, p. 458; Mirce 1–2, p. 462), as argued above (§2.2.2.1), in almost certainly his; 9 (Northu 48–52, 57:2, 58, 60, pp. 383–384; Rect 1, p. 444; Wif 7, p. 442, although the latter case is weaker than the other two) in either his or under his influence. Wulfstan, it is worthwhile reminding, actively partook in drafting royal law-codes and was well-familiar with the tradition. In this way, at the end of the day, of the 70 legal references to *thegns* only three (Cambridge Guild Regulation, p. 610; Duns 5, p. 376; Wal, p. 393) can be said to really have come not from a known royal legislator, but even here, as will be discussed below (p. 198), two were evidentially familiar with kings' laws and their language.

420 Stein 1947a–b. Stein's biography that contributed to this radicalism of his, so much as I can tell, has been tackled only by Ubl 2017, pp. 14–18.

421 See a modern edition with an extensive introduction by Drew 1991.

422 In English, overviewed by Murray 1983, pp. 119–133.

423 Ganshof 1957a–b. Both articles were later edited as a separate book in 1958 and then translated into German in 1961. Roach 2013, pp. 480–483 (nn. 79–80, 86–87) briefly summarised subsequent studies on Caroligian capitularies.

424 Nehlsen 1977. Modern summary of *Lex Salica* as a source, its genesis, dissemination, and other questions are presented by Ubl 2017.

This historiographical context was the breeding ground for Patrick Wormald. He exercised '[p]erhaps the greatest influence on contemporary Anglo-Saxon legal studies'[425] and was a 'single figure [...] with a particular talent for pithily encapsulating and thereby defining his generation's thoughts on any given subject'[426] pertaining to the Anglo-Saxon law. Wormald studied it in the overall early medieval textual legal culture of Western Europe. The title of his first major article in this vein[427] is a clear nod to the foregoing discussion on the Continent. Key to his interpretations was the idea expressed by his tutor John Michael Wallace-Hadrill (1916–1985) that the promulgation of law by early medieval kings served ideological purposes much more than practical aspirations of effective governance. Wormald syncretised this idea with criticism of viewing Anglo-Saxon state and society as "primitive". Wormald added many points to Nehlsen's about the impracticality of the *lex scripta* from a modern point of view. The written law east of the Rhine, in Northern Francia, and in England did not strive for a coherent codification[428] and left no mention of some otherwise indisputable legal novelties; it lacked official record or regulated textual protocol; extant manuscripts are not the most copious and bear no traces of active use, not facile anyway due to their physical format and textual composition intermixed with extra-legal material, etc.

Wormald's thesis regarding the ideological load in Anglo-Saxon laws saw less revision than that the written word played no significant role in everyday legal activities.[429] Since then, on the one hand, the dichotomy between the oral and written media of dissemination of early medieval royal law has been partially discredited as too modernist.[430] On the other, collected hints at the sustained losses of mundane legal documentation (such as Anglo-Saxon writs) but also more solemn pieces (such as probable law-codes and tracts)[431] have evinced its wider use and reception. The mnemonic medium of textual transmission also deserves attention.[432] That Anglo-Saxon royal written legal promulgations were put

425 Rabin 2020, p. 6.

426 Lambert 2017, p. 20 (n. 55). Wormald's written and intellectual legacy has been summarised by Foot 2009a–b.

427 Wormald 1977. Wormald's *The Making of English Law* (1999) underlies the ensuing overview of his views as the pinnacle of his legal research.

428 A good illustration of the lack of any systematic legislative programme is the Carolingian inconsistency in *wergild* rules and tariffs despite ascribed to Charlemagne initiative to record the oral laws of the peoples in his empire (Ubl 2021).

429 Briefly overviewed by Jurasinski and Oliver 2021, pp. 78–81. Two collective volumes in Wormald's own lifetime added significant nuance regarding the extent of literary use in early medieval court (Davies and Fouracre 1986) and more generally as a whole (McKitterick 1990; see the editor's further problematisations of medieval literacy, including a self-standing 1989 monograph). Besides them, early Anglo-Saxon vernacular literacy from above was broached by Keynes 2003, and from below by Kathryn Lowe (see above, n. 404). See a broader European overview of bureaucracy, written law, and its implementation by Rollason 2018, chap 7.

430 For instance, an addition to the London "peace guild" seems to treat King Æthelstan's oral and written decrees in tandem: *swa ic beboden haebbe, ⁊ on urum gewritum stent* (lit. in accordance with what I have commanded and what stands in our documents; VI As 11, p. 182), – contents would seem to take precedence over form.

431 Hough 2014, pp. 10–14, overviewed the most apparent known losses: the Kentish laws of King Eorcenberht (r. 640–664) mentioned by Bede; certain peace treaties (OE *friðgewritu*) with the Scandinavians in the north and east mentioned in II Ew 5:2, p. 144; Mercian laws of King Offa (r. 757–797) referred to in Af Introduction 49:9, p. 46. Besides those, Alcuin (*c.* 735–804) mentioned of the Northumbrian King Oswiu (r. 646–670) a reputation of a just law-giver, and Carella 2019 made a case for a once existing Latin Northumbrian law before the Viking Age.

432 Nelsen 1990, p. 267, cites a case of a Francian aristocrat knowing Justinian's laws by heart (LAT. *memoriter*). Though non-legal, a good Anglo-Saxon example is the homily *Be Heofonwarum ⁊ Be Helwarum*, arguably

into at least *some* practice is today more or less accepted.[433] As for the lack of overt references to them, Simon Keynes and Catherine Cubitt emphasise the difference between passive knowing and active quoting royal law. Levi Roach further mustered an argument to approach royal law more as common guidelines for judges on the ground rather than as an ultimate quotable legal compendium.[434]

Lest the interpretative pendulum swing dialectically too far back, crucial for the discussion in this book is recognition that known royal law-codes did not and could not embrace all day-to-day patchwork-like legal praxes. Roach's explanation closes Wormald's epistemological gap left by the total absence of kings' law-codes from the 178 extant court records, but less so the practical challenge to methodologically overcoming it. For example, King Æthelred's Wantage law-code (likely 997 AD) does not shy away from admitting co-existence of low-level court decisions side-by-side with extra-legal settlements.[435] In governmental affairs, *verbum regis* remained intertwined with *lex scripta* even late in the period.[436] Laws abound with expressions like OE *wē cwǣdon* (lit. we said) and *cyning cwæþ* (lit. king says),[437] and many such – in the literal sense – pronouncements may have gone unrecorded. In the end, we are dealing with anything but an exhaustive corpus; rather, it is a synthesis of only superficially similar legal texts produced on various occasions across centuries[438] that,

> [...] most accurately represent [...] the mind and views of those legislating and writing down the legal texts,[439]

– that is to say, first and foremost of Cerdicing kings and their advisors before anyone else.

3.2.1.3 *Domesday Book*

"Domesday Book" in a wider sense is the modern collective name for a family of thirty Latin texts that preserved the record of the pan-English land survey commissioned late in the reign of William the Conqueror. In a narrower use, it applies to the two longest and most complete of them: the so-called "Great" (*alias* the Exchequer) Domesday and "Little" Domesday, so that the rest commonly pass as "satellites". The former was a product of a

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recorded from memory (Teresi 2000).

433 E.g., Lambert 2012, pp. 32–39; 2017, *passim*. Known *heriots* from wills (Lavelle 2010, pp. 116–120) indicate that this custom, even if not as tidy as Wulfstan's neat regulation on King Cnut's behalf, underlay it nonetheless.

434 Roach 2013, with references to French and German scholarship of Carolingian textual-legal praxes since Ganshof and Nehlsen and to works by both Keynes and Cubitt, as well as others.

435 III Atr 13:3, p. 232.

436 Ætheling Edward with envoys were sent from Normandy by the temporarily exiled King Æthelred to negotiate his restoration (*ASC*: 1014 AD [MSS C, D, E]: …⁊ *het gretan ealne his leodscipe* ⁊ *cwæð þæt* ['...and bade them greet all his people, and said that...'; quote after MS E]). In S 1454, the same king dispatched Abbot Ælfhere of Bath to a local court with a royal seal only (…*sende se cyning be Æluere abbude his insegel* […] ⁊ *grette ealle þa witan* […] ⁊ *bæd* ⁊ *het* ['...the king sent his seal, by means of Abbot Ælfhere [...] and greeted all the councillors [...] and bade and commanded...']) – that is, of course, unless "seal" was a shorthand for "seal and writ". S 877 (996 AD) has the king four times send commands to a law offender. S 1462 (1016×1035 AD) says that 'Tofi the Proud came there [= to a shire court] on the king's business' (*Tofig Pruda com þær on þæs Cinges ærende – cf.* a similar wording in *ASC*: 1054 AD [MS D]: *Ðæs ilcan ger*[*er*]*es for Aldred biscop to Colne ofer sæ, þæs kynges ærende…* ['In the course of this same year Bishop Aldred went overseas to Cologne on the king's business']). An oral medium of transmitting the royal will seems to have lain underpinned all such messages, probably authenticated by officially issued credential tokens, such as frequently mentioned in *Domesday Book* seals.

437 *Cf.* the standard notification writ formula, OE *īc cȳðe ēow þæt* (lit. I tell you that).

438 Hough 2014, p. 23; Hudson 2012, p. 867.

439 Tveit 2016, p. 22. *Cf.* a very similar idea and its methodological consequences by Lambert 2017, pp. 14–15.

Map 7. Domesday Circuits. Shire borders drawn according to how they appear in *Domesday Book* which are, apart from the creation Lancashire in place of "between the Ribble and the Mersey" appended to Cheshire and of Westmoreland and Cumberland patchily covered in the Yorkshire folios, only insignificantly deviant from the borders of "historic shires"

single main scribe plus a corrector who across 383 folios reworked the survey returns for all shires south of the river Tees save Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk. These latter three were reworked separately by seven scribes in a 450-folio volume in a smaller format (hence,

"Little" in the name).[440] The rationale for and events surrounding the inquest and subsequent textual production have occupied the minds of generations of Domesday scholars.[441] Adopted below is Steven Baxter's interpretative summary, formulated during the collaborative project *The Conqueror's Commissioners: Unlocking the Domesday Survey of South-Western England* (2014–2017).[442]

The Domesday inquest was likely agreed upon by King William and his barons in Gloucester in midwinter 1085 AD. The enterprise, incentivised but not necessarily caused by an aborted Danish invasion that year, appears to have been a country-wide fiscal survey to maximise regal incomes from all tenable sources. The barons' stake in it was to promote and safeguard their title to landed property. At the Gloucester meeting, the country was divided into seven "Circuits" of contiguous shires (Map 7).[443] Within about a month, royal commissioners and barons had promptly collected the first raw data for each Circuit – barons by own means, commissioners from swarms of sworn jurors who provided oral testimonies pertaining to the times of Kings Edward and William (notionally 1066 and 1086 AD, accordingly).[444] Thereafter and until 5 April commissioners privately interviewed landholders in a geographic order (probably reflected in one of the "satellites", *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*). Immediately thereafter but before 24 May, there followed public check-ups on the ground by new, impartial commissioned teams, who also recorded objections under various names (LAT. *clamores*, *invasiones super regem*, *terra occupata*, etc.) but left them unresolved. Parallel to this, the royal treasury was collecting and registering the outstanding tax and relied upon Domesday second teams, as reflected in the "Exon [= Exeter] Domesday" "satellite" that covered Circuit 2. This text also provides evidence that at the next stage, by 1 August, the geographically arranged and checked material was being re-written in a fief-by-fief order and every fief (LAT. *honor*) received a summary, most of which, sadly, has perished. The "Great" and "Little" Domesdays represent the final stage. The latter was finished the same year and represented a good copy of the May-August feudal recension. The "Great" Domesday scribe, however, significantly intervened in, abbreviated, and re-grouped his material while also retaining formulaic idiosyncrasies typical of each Circuit[445] but not the Circuit structure itself. King William's death on 9 September the following year likely scrambled previous plans, so that for the lack of time, "Little" Domesday was never compressed in a similar manner.

Elucidating the complex mechanics and aims of the Domesday inquest helps withstanding *Domesday Book*'s seductiveness as an ostensibly straightforward, "objective" register. Perhaps it was meant to be. But with so many pressed-for-time teams involved and multiple abbreviated and reworked layers, *Domesday Book* – a royal fiscal cadastre much more than a population census – was not executed as such. With respect to the "times of King

440 Roffe 2000, chap 4.

441 In the lack of a more up-to-date bibliographical overview, this statement is borne out by the massive catalogue of Domesday scholarship by Bates 1986.

442 Baxter 2017 (esp. pp. 278–293).

443 Williams 1995, p. 111 (table 3).

444 The probable utilised questionnaire has been preserved in the prologue to one of the "satellites", *Inqusitio Eliensis*.

445 See a case study of LAT. *geldum* (< OE *here-* or *danegeld*) and its treatment by the "Great" Domesday scribe that exposes them as a diligent copyist, who 'worked directly from sources compiled at the circuit level, these circuit returns themselves perhaps retaining some forms they found in their sources' (Palmer 2016, p. 65 *et passim*).

Edward", moreover, it processed human memory in its own idiosyncratic bureaucratic Norman Latin, and was lenient towards terminological inconsistencies when they did not obstruct the inquest's purpose. Pre-Conquest data loss, omission, or cutting of corners of in the Domesday project must be borne in mind at all times. In practical terms, this research relies upon the printed Phillimore bilingual edition (1973–1986),[446] and especially its assiduously crafted indices, published as separate volumes. In addition, the digital PASE Domesday[447] has been of great use in helping to identify individual people mentioned in the inquest, especially in §3.4.5.3.

3.2.2 Practical Methodology and Technique

The arrival of DOE Web Corpus has made possible exhaustive search for individual Old English lexemes. This tool is invaluable for the present study as it allows to move beyond the already well and often studied sources that contain OE *þegn*. This statement requires a qualification, though. DOE Web Corpus is designed to search not words as such but rather combinations of characters (including proximity search, Boolean search, and simple search). In DOE, finished lemmas include possible orthographies and approximate number of occurrences. At the moment this study was completed, the corpus has been processed as far as the letter "I" which necessitated that at the first step a list of all spellings of *thegn* be put together and then map them in DOE Web Corpus. This list yielded 83 hypothetical spelling variations of which 22 are actually attested. Together they yield ca. 2,000 hits in the corpus. Certain imprecision emerges due to the frequent occurrence of the letter cluster *-þen-* (and other possible spellings) in words other than *þegn*.[448] These latter results, too, have been studied, though, albeit perhaps less systematically than others.

The ca. 2,000 hits just mentioned do not include OE *þegnung* (lit. service) or OE *þegnian* (lit. to serve). These lemmas and their derivatives will not be studied below for two reasons. First, OE *þegnung* does not truly pertain to the secular sphere of the early medieval English society the present book concerns with. It connotes service in religious contexts, such as this or that prelate's days and achievements in ecclesiastical office. OE *þegnian* is a denominal suffixed verb and it maintained its literal and basic semantics intact with no observable fluctuations that could yield substance for a socio-historical enquiry such as the current one. Second, at least as regards OE *þegnung*, the preliminary study by David Carlton satisfies the need for separate research into this lexeme and its compounds.[449]

Given the unevenness of the distribution of our sources outlined above context analysis had to be performed with due discretion. On a theoretical level, the chosen procedure

446 At the moment research for this book was being carried out, the Phillimore Domesday text (except Yorkshire) and ancillary resources, first digitised by prof John Palmer in 2008, were also available at and used from the digital repository at Hull University called "Hydra". It was then discontinued and the Domesday contents will be moved to other repositories and are currently hosted at the 'Domesday dataset's temporary home' (available online at: <https://www.hull.ac.uk/choose-hull/study-at-hull/library/resources/domesday-dataset> [accessed 25 November 2023]). Previously, the Phillimore translation and facsimiles of the "Great" Domesday had also been released by John Palmer, Matthew Palmer and George Slater on a CD-ROM under the name *Domesday Explorer*, which I also used for Yorkshire entries. On other digitalisation initiatives of *Domesday Book*, see Palmer 2016, pp. 61–63.

447 On it, see Baxter and Lewis 2017, pp. 346–348.

448 Another minor noticed imprecision is due to the omission of the B manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which however contained only 14 hits, all of which are otherwise compensated for by the versions of other manuscripts.

449 Carlton 2019, pp. 110–121.

dictated that every single occurrence of OE *þegn* had to be meticulously examined in its textual surrounding, one by one. Naturally, oftentimes such pedanticism turned evidently superflous: cases such as with royal diplomas and writs or New Testament glosses mentioned in the preceding section prove that for many hits only a cursory inspection sufficed. On the reverse side, attempts at circumventing repetitiveness of some sources by means of selectivity can lead to, proverbially, throwing out the baby with the bathwater: rare or unique senses or nuances may simply get overlooked. As a result, a middle ground was found in that *all* hits for OE *þegn* in DOE Web Corpus were at least cursorily inspected and accounted for in the interests of statistics (*cf.* called for caution in interpreting it above, p. 84), but only the cases judged as most telling, informative, and revealing formed the go-to empirical base for the study.

Considering the number of individual texts at hand, consecutive source-critical analysis exceeded the scope of this study. Instead, as a rule, information on provenance, dating, and peculiar textual features was derived from commentaries in modern editions. Additional literature was consulted in complicated cases. Chronology of Wulfstan's works was adopted from Sara Pons-Sanz's seminal study[450] (with a further discussion by Andrew Rabin),[451] and that of Ælfric's from Aaron Kleist's.[452] Patrick Wormald's work on most occasions supplied this book with dates and underlying details for Anglo-Saxon legal material.[453] One crucial exception to this principle is Old English poetry, which more often than not resists absolute dating and mostly comes from

> [...] manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the greater part in the four so-called Poetic Codices [the Nowell Codex, Exeter Book, Vercelli Book, and Junius manuscript] all written within the period 975–1025.[454]

The American linguist Robert Fulk's extensive research on Old English poetic metre development provided a major help.[455] That being said, the question remains a matter of scholarly contention. Thus, in the introductory notes in the volumes of the *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* that offer many a readily available text under discussion, editors often cautiously abstain from definitive pronouncements, and *Beowulf*, despite Fulk's rigour, still gives rise to debates.[456] Delving into them goes beyond the scope of this study and, quite frankly, contributes little to answering the asked in §1.4 research questions. Poetry is a linguistic register in and of itself that exists according to its own rules which do not necessarily conform to the same mainstream lexical development of a given language.[457] As will become apparent, meanings of OE *þegn* often depend on genre and context and in Old English poetry, they are consonant with the word's functioning in prose (hence more easily

450 Pons-Sanz 2007a, p. 25.
451 Rabin 2015.
452 Kleist 2019.
453 Wormald 1999.
454 Scragg 2013, p. 51.
455 Fulk 1992. The chronology is summarised at pp. 348–418, and a concise table was put together by Neidorf 2014, p. 10.
456 E.g., Frank 2007; Scragg 2013, p. 53 (with no references, though); Neidorf 2014; Weiskott 2016, chap 2, to name a few.
457 Eric Weiskott advances a similar argument and asserts that, 'metrical form has a history of its own, which cannot be reduced to cultural, linguistic, political, or textual history. To the extent that verse history registers events in these other historical series [...] it does so through the medium of its own logic' (Weiskott 2016, p. 23).

datable) specimens of the same textual types and comparable genres. Fulk's datings were therefore conceded as provisional with only secondary bearing on the results of the study.

3.3 Old English *Þegn*

This section will correspond to the *first stage* in the suggested methodology above (above, §1.7.1). As regards research questions, it aims at providing answers to Question 1. More specifically the sub-chapter will chart the primary meanings of OE *þegn* detactable in texts and attempt to trace and, whenever feasible, explain the changes it underwent in the social domain. In the grander design of the book as a whole, the current section is further called for, if this research earnestly aims to assess the validity of the "Aakjærian" treatment of Old English linguistic data as a pivotal supplement to those in Old Norse.

Dissecting and separating exact meanings of OE *þegn* in each and every particular instance (ever more so in poetry) is presently impossible, because even in context the word does not always easily fit into one discrete category. One example will suffice. In his paraphrase of Josh. 10:12, Ælfric has the sun standing still *þurh þæs þegnes bene* ("through the *thegn*'s prayer").[458] The *thegn* in question is Joshua but in this fragment, he simultaneously acts in two capacities: he is a servant of God but also a military commander. Both of these senses for OE *þegn* are attested in the corpus, including Ælfric's own penmanship, so it is virtually impossible to unambiguously translate this line into modern English. This particular example is somewhat extreme, since, when seen outside the context, the two possible renditions are not compatible. In many other cases ambiguity that does not preclude compatibility is caused by the wide semantics of OE *þegn* itself. Luckily, such instances are not numerically overwhelming but nevertheless frequent enough to warrant an introductory disclaimer: the proposed catalogue should not be considered absolute or final, some of the specimens can be re-categorised; as a rule, only unambiguous samples are brought to the fore in what follows below.

3.3.1 (*Generic*) *Servant. Minister*

By far, the most straightforward and frequent meaning of OE *þegn* is, without reservations, "servant" in the broadest sense, with all its accompanying connotations. It is attested in all textual formats, types, across 15 unique genres, and all periods throughout.

In this state *thegns* can be found in association with a plethora of various masters. In the West Saxon version of Mt 20:26, Jesus teaches Zebedee's sons that the one of them to lead them should become their *thegn*.[459] Similarly, in Ælfric's retelling of the parable on forgiveness (Mt 18:23–35), the king's debtor is his *thegn*.[460] In the version of St Margaret's *Vita* in BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A iii, the governor of Antioch, when desiring the holy maiden, commands his *thegns* to bring her to him.[461] King Hrothgar's daughter's *thegn* gets killed by one of the Heatho-Bards in course of an emerging brawl.[462] A *thegn* of a man possessed by devil runs and knocks on an abbey's door to tell the abbess of his master's malady.[463] In terms of frequency, after kings, *thegns* as servants in a general sense often accompany bishops,

458 *De Temporibus Anni*, p. 88 (ll. 294–298).
459 *WSG*, Mt 20:26.
460 MS Bodley 343, homily 2 (ll. 138–142).
461 *St Margaret*, p. 354.
462 *Beowulf*, ll. 2057–2062.
463 *OEHE*, book III, chap 8, p. 18.

abbots, and holy men. St Neot asks his servant to fetch him his shoe.[464] St Guthlac enters into a conversation with 'a learned man whose name was Wigfrith' who 'traveled there among the bishop's other' *thegns*.[465] In a paraphrase of Jn 18:10 in the Vercelli Homilies, Peter cuts off the high priest's servant's ear.[466] When asked, why he stopped in the middle of a sentence, St Æthelwald replies his disciple (OE *leornere*) and *thegn* that he cannot speak and listen to heavens at the same time.[467]

By and large, it seems that from early on there existed an equivalence between LAT. *minister* and OE *þegn*. A good early testimony to this equality are the glosses in the Vespasian Psalter (*c.* 820×850 AD) where *minister* gets consistently replaced with *þegn* in Psalms 102 [103]:21 and 103 [104]:4–5.[468] Such a parity would remain extremely stable over the course of centuries.[469] On many occasions, whenever a Latin text employed *minister*, its Old English analogue would prefer *þegn*. This principle worked the other way around too, and so much so that at times it makes an impression of nearly a slavish copying. Out of 27 annals in all of the manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that mention *thegns*, the mid-12th-century historian John of Worcester (d. *c.* 1140) diligently translated 19 (see APPENDIX 3.2).[470] Only in three of them did he not use *minister*: *s.a.* 465 AD, he contextually preferred LAT. *miles*; *s.a.* 988 AD, he chose LAT. *satrapa*;[471] and *s.a.* 1126/1127 AD, he left the word out (apparently, by inclusion of the *ðeines* of the original among the *principes terre ipsius*). This lexical choice made a lot of sense up until 917/918 AD, where the original would invariably read "king's *thegn*" (OE *cyninges þegn*),[472] but not after, when the implied meaning is "aristocrat" (below, §3.3.11). As to the date of origin of this parity, the evidence is only indirect. *Ministri* sporadically figure in royal diplomas already in the 8th century, though in Wessex their appearance becomes more stable only after in the second quarter of the 9th century, and at the same time, below the level of *dux*, non-royal witnesses of earlier charters usually include *comites*.[473] If the equivalence of LAT. *minister* and OE *þegn* can be extended into this early period, we may speculate that it arose during the 8th century if not before, to judge from Bede's frequent use of *minister* in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* and its reversed translation as OE *þegn* in the Alfredian vernacular version some 150 years later.

464 MS Vesp. D. XIV, homily 42, pp. 130–131.

465 *St Guthlac*, 195, 199.

466 *VH* 1, ll. pp. 113–115.

467 Old English *Martyrologium*, p. 82–83 (Æthelwald 66).

468 Vespasian Psalter, p. 99.

469 The cited Psalms offer a good illustration to this effect, as subsequent Old English psalters (Arundel Psalter, Cambridge Psalter, Eadwine's Canterbury Psalter, Junius Psalter, Lambeth Psalter, Regius Psalter, Vitellius Psalter, Tiberius Psalter, Paris Psalter) will invariably follow this precedent well into the 12th century. On Anglo-Saxon Psalters and their glossed translations more generally, see Pulsiano 2001 and Toswell 2012.

470 *ASC* and JW: *s.aa.* 465 (MSS A, E, F)/461 AD (MSS B, C); 626 (MS E)/627 AD (in John's translation); 755 (MSS A, B, C, D, E)/784 AD (in John's translation); 871 (MSS A, D, E, St Neot's)/872 (MSS B, C) AD; 874 (MSS A, E, St Neot's)/875 AD (MSS B, C); 893 (MS A)/894 AD (MSS B, C, D); 895 (MS A)/896 (MSS C, D) AD; 896 (MS A)/897 AD (MSS B, C, D); 904 (MS A, St Neot's)/905 AD (MSS C, D); 917 (MSS B, C, D)/918 (in John's translation) AD; 988 AD; 1010 AD; 1013 AD; 1015 AD; 1039 AD; 1052 AD; 1065 AD; 1067 AD; 1126 (in John's translation)/1127 AD (MS E).

471 This equivalent was not John's invention. Ælfric proposed it in his *Glossary* (Grammatik und Glossar, p. 306) and about the same time so did another glossary (BM, MS 32, and BM, MS Additional 32246, p. 95 [l. 1721]).

472 Except for 465/461 AD which reads *heora* [*an*] *þegn* ('[one of] their [Kings Hengest and Æsc's] thegn') and 917/918 AD that reads *hire þegna feower* ('her [Æthelflæd's, Lady of the Mercians] four thegns'), but the idea is all the same.

473 More on witness terminology in the earliest Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas, see Chadwick 1905, pp. 315–328; Thacker 1981.

Old English offered its users an array of lexemes to denote service and persons performing it, OE *þegn* being only one option. A good deal of them, though, connoted servitude and/or coercion, often with the sense of "serfdom" and "slavery".[474] Against this background, an examination of the list of contexts where OE *þegn* is best understood as a servant reveals a very consistent attribute: *thegn* (first and foremost in secular context) is always (except the Northumbrian glosses to the Gospel of Matthew) free and never forced to submission. This was first observed by Henry Loyn, who further noted that where the Latin original left room for ambiguity, King Alfred's translators expanded their wording. Loyn drew an example from the vernacular version of *Cura Pastoralis* and its use of *servus* which, unlike *minister*, could and often did mean "slave". To mitigate a possible misunderstanding, translators devised *ða ðegnas, ⁊ eac ða ðeowas*.[475] This seems to be not an isolated case, for in a later translation of the Gospels, where in Jn 18:18 Peter stands by the fire among the high priest's *servi*, the West Saxon version reads *ða þeowas and ða þegnas*;[476] the same expansion of the plain LAT. *servi* thrice to *ðea*[*s*] *ł ðegnas* and once to *ðegn ł esne*[477] occurs in the Lindisfarne glosses (Mt 13:27–28; 18:32; 20:27); one manuscript of the Old English *Cura Pastoralis* renders LAT. *Christi servus* in chap 19 as *þegen ł þeow* added above the line.[478] Symptomatically, whereas in Old English prose the standard rendition of the Latin collocations *servus/famulus Dei* used to be *Godes þeōw*,[479] in Old English poetry, with its 'insistently aristocratic value-system and which concerns itself with people who are exclusively from the higher ranks of society', "God's servants" become *Godes þegnas* on almost all occasions (also below, §3.3.5).[480]

Given the not only frequent but also non-genre specific and chronologically unconditioned appearance of this meaning, we will probably not err to consider "(free) servant" OE *þegn*'s generic, basic sense that captured its semantics well. All subsequent meanings seem to be much more dependent on context.

3.3.2 (*Specialist*) *Servant*

OE *þegn* figures in several two-word compounds that apply to people performing specialised services. Such compounds are at first glance negligibly rare in the whole scope of the corpus – merely 66 instances. But as argued above at p. 84, due to the nature of the corpus, factors other than solely numerical values must be considered. *Þegn*-compounds occur in all textual formats and types, 38 individual elements of 21 unique sources of 12 genres, as early as *c.* 700 AD (the *Épinal-Erfurt Glossary*) and as late as 1120 AD in the Peterborough version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. When taken together, this plethora testifies to the active circulation of such compounds. That they appear in glossaries and documentary pieces also indicates their penetration in wide linguistic registers, probably those of daily language as well.

474 A good exposition of such terminology is Appendix I in Pelteret 2001, pp. 261–330.
475 Loyn 1955, p. 546.
476 *WSG*, Jn 18:18.
477 On the latter lexeme, see Pelteret 2001, pp. 271–274; *cf.* OE *efnehegn* (lit. co-*thegn*) in the same parable (Mt 18:28, 29, 31) to gloss LAT. *coservus*. Pelteret notes (at pp. 270–271) that in this passage 'other translations use *efenþeow*(*a*)' and Aldred himself has *efne-esne* in Mt 18:33.
478 Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.5.22 (717) (Schreiber 2003, p. 236).
479 Pelteret 2001, p. 305; Schreiber 2003, p. 500.
480 Magennis 1998, pp. 148–154 (quote from p. 148). The same article (at pp. 141–147) offers a concise overview of the concept "slave of God" in earlier Christian literature.

The list of such compounds includes: OE *hūselþegn* ("acolyte": lit. Eucharist servant); *būrþegn* and *beddþegn* ("chamberlain": lit. room servant and bed servant, respectively); *horsþegn* ("groom" and, probably, "master of horses/stables", *cf.* Frankish marshal: lit. horse servant);[481] *hrægelþegn* ("keeper of vestments", "master of wardrobe": lit. garment servant); *scēohþegn* ("shoemaker": lit. shoe servant); *discþegn* ("steward", "seneschal": lit. dish servant); *mēteþegn* ("waiter", "butler": lit. food servant); *dūruþegn* ("doorkeeper": lit. door servant); *healþegn* and *seleþegn* ("household retainer": lit. hall servant);[482] *ambehtþegn* ("cup bearer", "attendant": lit. service servant; a pleonastic doublet); *wicþegn* ("hebdomadary": lit. week servant)' and probably the already mentioned Wulfstanian *mæsseþegn* ("priest": lit. *thegn* of the mass) and *weōfodþegn* ("priest": lit. *thegn* of altar) as a counterpart to his *worldþegn* (lit. secular *thegn*).[483] As such, these composites illustrate the productive character of the root *-þegn-* in Old English and that by itself the semantics of OE *þegn* allowed for a great degree of flexibility. As suggestd earlier, specific meanings seems to be largely conditioned by surrounding context.

3.3.3 Servant of Ruler. Servant of King. Liegeman

Another well-represented meaning has already been mentioned: a person in service of a ruler or, more specifically, king. It is well-attested in the corpus: in both prose and poetry (though not glosses), religious and secular, in at least 14 genres, as early as the law-code of King Ine and as late as 1123 AD in the E manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* Unlike the cases discussed above, though, on its own OE *þegn* never means "ruler's servant" in and of itself. This sense necessitates a qualifier in form of *genetivus possessivus* of another noun (common or proper) or pronoun.

The general features of "ruler's *thegns*" have already been laid out above, namely that the prominence of such persons is directly dependent on the ruler's prominence. At the same time, OE *þegn* must have occasionally felt too broad in its semantics when in context of secular service to high lords. Perhaps, for this reason and to connote some sense of hierarchy and selectiveness the OE compound *ealdorþegn* (lit. elder *thegn*) gets coined rather early on. We first find it already in *Beowulf*.[484] Granted, as discussed above, the dating of this source can spur debates, but this compound is present in other sources too.[485] Peter is an "elder *thegn*" among the apostles,[486] and the twelve apostles are similarly distinguished from the 70 (72) disciples.[487] Another possible, though rare equivalent seems to have been

481 von Olberg 1991, §4.3.2.2.

482 *Seleþegn* appears only once in *Beowulf* (l. 1794). *Healþegn* is a *dis legomenon* found only in *Beowulf* (ll. 142 and 719), and on both occasions the head element *heal-* seems to owe its presence to alliteration (*heal-ðegnes hete* and *heardran hæle*, *heal-ðegnas fand*). It therefore does not appear reasonable to put too much stock into a putative distinction between "*thegns* who live/serve in a lord's hall" and all other *thegns*.

483 To this list may be added a peculiar formation OE *wīfþegn* ("procurer": lit. woman servant) which glosses the lemma *leno* in the First and Second Cleopatra Glossaries (ll. 156 and 129, respectively).

484 *Þa wæs frod cyning, har hilderinc, on hreon mode, syðþan he aldor-þegn unlyfigendne, þone deorestan deadne wisse* ('Then the wise old king, the hoary war-maker, was in a rueful mood, after he knew that his lordly thane was lifeless, his dearest dead'; *Beowulf*, ll. 1306–1309).

485 Including other poetry, e.g., in *Judith* (ll. 236–246): *Hie wordum þæt þam yldestan ealdor-þegnum cyðan eodon…* ('They went to convey that in words to the most senior aides to the prince...').

486 *VH 5*, ll. 109–113; *VH* 15, ll. 160–167.

487 *…hæfdon mænige ær wundra geworhte geond wærþeoda, swylce hi æfter þam unrim fremedon swutelra and gesynra þurh sunu meotudes, ealdorþegnas* ('...the chief *thegns* had formerly worked many wonders among people, and also after that performed countless distinct and evident signs through the son of god'; *OEMC*, p. 80 [ll. 126–130]). A discussion of OE *ealdorþegn* was offered by Roberts 2000, pp. 83–84.

an "ealdorman of *thegn*(*ship*)".[488] There are two occasions when an "elder *thegn*" clearly means "a leader of a (military) group",[489] but because both are poetic, this could be due to the metrical conventions rather than precise meaning. A similar sense was achieved by replacing OE *ealdor* with the OE adjective *hēah*[490] (*cf.* "high reeve" in *Norðleoda Laga*). On the other hand, "high *thegn*" can stand for a foreign office that had no readily available place in native Anglo-Saxon hierarchy.[491] In combinations "adjective for hierarchy" + "*thegn*" four features stand out. First, on some rare occasions *genetivus possessivus* gets omitted (above, nn. 485, 487, 489). Second, except for the two poetic cases just mentioned, all others are still conditioned by an elder *thegn*'s position in relation to a lord. Third, though caution was advocated above when considering statistical lexicographical data (above, p. 84), all these overall exceptional occurrences belong to various and internally diverse genres and specimens within them, so none of these uses seems to have really caught on. Fourth and finally, none of these expressions of compounds employ the OE adjective *gōd* or similar. This latter fact will come particularly important in the discussion of the Old Norse lexical material.

If we move beyond the literary realm and instead turn to sources supposedly describing Anglo-Saxon societal landscape, we shall quickly find that "king's *thegn*" occupies a significant portion of space therein. This fact, though, must evoke a great deal of caution, for as mentioned a few times above, a similarly great deal of such sources came from the royal chancery, first among them laws, royal diplomas, and writs. By and large, it would probably not stretch the evidence to assign such occurrences a broad meaning "king's liegeman" or "commended person", often in a *comitatus* – both Tacitean and that envisaged by Mitteis – sense. It is perhaps these qualities that makes them eligible for military leadership on behalf of their monarchs (below, §3.3.6).

488 *On ðone feorðan dæg þæs monðes bið Sancte Adrianes ðrowung þæs æþelan weres; se wæs ðæs caseres ðegnscipes ealdorman, ðe Maximianus wæs nemned* ('On the fourth day of the month is the passion of the famous man St Adrian; he was head of the guard of the emperor called Maximian'; Old English *Martyrologium*, p. 60 [4 March]; … *ond he wæs hire þegna ⁊ huses ⁊ hire geferscipes ofer all aldormon* ('...and was the chief head over all her servants, her house, and her retinue'; *OEHE*, book IV, chap 3, p. 262).

489 *Ða com in gan ealdor ðegna, dæd-cene mon dome gewurþad, hæle hilde-deor, Hroðgar gretan…* ('The leader of the thanes, a man of decisive action, then came walking in, bathed in glory, a battle-brave hero, to approach Hrothgar'; *Beowulf*, ll. 1644–1646); *Swa firenfulle facnum wordum heora aldor-ðægn on reordadon, on cearum cwidum* ('So the sinful amid their sorrows spoke with treacherous words and speeches to their leader'; *Christ and Satan*, ll. 65–68).

490 *Ða on þam feorðan dæge feormode se ealdorman his heahþegnas on his getelde…* ("Then on the fourth day the *ealdorman* [Holofernes] had a feast in a tent for his high *thegns*..."; Homilien und Heiligenleben, homily 9, ll. 283–286; *Hwæt ða Datianus wearð færlice ofslagen mid heofonlicum fyre and his geferan samod, þa ða he hamweard wæs mid his heah-þegenum, and he becom to helle ær ðan þe to his huse* ('Well then, Datianus was suddenly killed by heavenly fire along with his companions, when he was traveling homeward with his chief officers, and he arrived in hell rather than at his house'; *LS* III, *St Vincent*, ll. 179–182).

491 *Ða wæs sum heah-þegen gehaten Tetradius, and his þeowa manna an wæs þearle awed* ('There was at that time a proconsul called Tetradius, and one of his slaves was raving mad'); *Arborius wæs gehaten sum heahþegen on þam lande, swiðe geleafful man, and his dohtor læg on fefore þearle gebrocod* ('There was a prefect in that area called Arborius, a man of great faith, and his daughter lay in a fever, seriously ill'; *LS* III, *St Martin*, ll. 506–507, 574–576); *Hwæt ða wearð gecydd þam cyninge Antioche embe Iudan sige, and he geswarc ða on mode, and sende ða his here mid anum heah-þegne Lisias gehaten to Iudea lande* ('Well then, news about Judas's victory was announced to king Antiochus, and his mood darkened, and then he sent his army to Judea under a high-ranking noble called Lisias'; *LS* III, *The Martyrdom of the Maccabees*, ll. 329–332). Though in 1 Macc. 3, Ælfric's obvious source, Lysias is indeed called "a noble man of royal kin" (*hom*[*o*] *nobil*[*is*] *de genere regali*), contextually preferable is to render OE *an hēahþegn* as "a high-ranking officer", since in Ælfric's text Lysias acts as a military commander and his nobility attracts no attention.

Outside Wulfstan's works, there exist only a few scant written pieces of evidence where commended men of lords other than kings could also be referred to as *thegns*. All of them cluster at the end of the first millennium AD or later.

Of the pre-Conquest non-Wulfstanian sources, strictly speaking, there are only three:

1. Eleven out of 78 land lease contracts[492] by the Worcester bishop Oswald, later archbishop of York (in office 962–991). These belong to a unique series of such documentation, most of which were preserved through a fortunate survival of one particular 11th-century manuscript, *Liber Wigorniensis*, included with the later Hemming's cartulary (BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A xiii) from the next century.[493] One additional similar charter is in Bishop Lyfing's name from 1042 AD.[494] In all twelve, prelates grant small land estates to their *thegns* for the duration of the tenants' and two of their heirs' lives.
2. A private writ by Queen Edith (1045–1066, d. 1076), dated to 1061×1066 AD, addressed to her brother Earl Harold son of Godwine (*c.* 1022–1066), 'and Tofig and all our thegns in Somerset'.[495]
3. The Peterborough redaction of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* preserves a unique mention in the annal of 1048 AD (*recte* 1051) that during a conflict with Earl Godwine and his family, King Edward the Confessor demanded 'all those thegns that the earls had had, and they were all handed over to him'.[496] The Worcester redaction contains a similar but abbreviated statement: 'And all the thegns of Harold his [= Godwine's] son were transferred to the king's allegiance'.[497] Previously during the confrontation both the King and Godwine's clan had mobilised their armed forces, and as much as there exists a scholarly consensus, lordship obligations to a great degree underpinned Anglo-Saxon military institutions. It is thus plausible that the earls' *thegns* were people who personally commended themselves to Godwine and his family and/or held some lands from them on lease, and therefore these bonds overran their general allegiance to King Edward, which the monarch sought to eradicate by his ultimatum. A telling parallel is narrated in *Domesday Book*: at some point, King Edward outlawed Eadric of Laxfield and confiscated his property but later pardoned him and allowed 'whichever of his free men under patronage wished to return to him they might return with his permission'.[498] The Winchester redaction (A) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, contains a further unique fact, also noted casually by the annalist, that in 1001 AD, offering armed resistance to viking marauders in Hampshire, 81 men were killed, and among them 'Wulfhere the bishop's thegn'.[499]

492 S 1300 (962 AD), 1304 (963 AD), 1305 (963 AD; Rob 36), 1310 (966 AD; Rob 43), 1311 (966 AD), 1314 (967 AD), 1316 (967 AD), 1334 (974 AD), 1347 (984 AD), 1350 (985 AD), and 1366 (991 AD; Rob 67).

493 An excellent study of this series was performed by Tinti 2018.

494 S 1394 (Rob 94).

495 *Eadgyð se hlauedige gret Harold erl mine broðar. ⁊ Touid ⁊ ealle ure þeyena on Sumerseatan. Freondliche* (S 1240; *Writs* 70).

496 *Ða gyrnde se cyng ealra þæra þegna þe þa eorlas ær hæfdon, ⁊ hi letan hi ealle him to handa* (*ASC*: 1048 AD [*recte* 1051; MS E]).

497 *⁊ man borhfæste þam kyninge ealle þa þægnas þe wæron Haroldes eorles his sunu* (*ASC*: 1052 AD [*recte* 1051; MS D]).

498 *…ut quicumque de suis liberis commendatibus hominibus ad eum uellent redire suo concessu redirent* (*DB* II, fols. 310b–311a [SUF 6,79]).

499 *…⁊ ðær wearð Æþelweard cinges heahgerefa ofslegen ⁊ Leofric æt Hwitciricean ⁊ Leofwine cinges heahgerefa ⁊ Wulfhere bisceopes ðegn ⁊ Godwine æt Worðige, Ælfsiges bisceopes sunu, ⁊ ealra manna an ⁊ hund eahtatig* ('...and there Æthelweard the king's high-reeve was but they were very stoutly killed, and Leofric of Whitchurch and Leofwine

Relevant post-Conquest sources are only two:

1. In his days in office (1099×1128 AD), bishop Ranulf of Durham at some point sent the community of St Cuthbert's a private writ in which he greeted 'all his thegns and drengs in Lindisfarne and Norham (Northumberland)'.[500]
2. *Domesday Book* contains 63 entries that mention *thegns* of lords other than King Edward. Six of them refer to groups of anonymous individuals (21 in total), and 18 other entries refer to individual *anonymi*. Provided none of them got recorded twice in different entries, this brings the maximum of non-royal *thegns* to 79. Four additional entries apply to people called *thegns* both of other lords and of King Edward.

As these testimonies stand, they do not allow a definitive answer on how widespread *thegnly* non-royal commendation was. Oswald's leases and Queen Edith and Bishop Ranulf's writs patently emulate royal diplomas and writs,[501] so, like with Alfredian prose, it is not clear how much they reflected the actual spoken use and how much their wording was due to cultural mimesis. *Domesday Book* seemingly offers a more secure foothold. But a closer inspection reveals a mass of terminological inconsistencies. Nearly all of the 63 entries in question come from Circuit 3, well-known for its attention to distinguishing various types of lordship ties.[502] As will be shown in §3.4.5.3, in *Domesday Book*, LAT. *tainus*, so long as it appears with a *genetivus possessivus* next to it, indeed denotes a commendation type of relationship. But Domesday commissioners or later scribes used it woefully unsystematically. Some very rich landed proprietors mentioned tens of times may be called *taini* + *genetivus possessivus* on merely one or two occasions. Conversely, some *taini* got to be recorded only once throughout the whole inquest, which begs the question of how many actual *thegns* remain invisible to us because of our inability to identify them without further *thegnly* qualifications in swarms of namesakes. Of all Domesday terms, LAT. *homo* + *genetivus possessivus* seems to be the single most common designation of commendation, and indeed, there are instances of LAT. (*liber*) *homo*'s interchangeability with LAT. *tainus* (below, n. 1029), as in the record of Eadric of Laxfield's return (see text above, n. 498). But how commonly accepted was this interchangeability? Should we accept its totality, the numbers of *thegns* in *Domesday Book* will rise dramatically, but this inevitably creates a problem of why some commissioners, also some of those outside Circuit 3, nevertheless preferred LAT. *tainus* over LAT. *homo* whilst their colleagues did the opposite.

A trend important to note and hard to miss is that, even with all regretful paucity of the sources under discussion, all evidence of actual rather than literary non-royal *thegns* comes from no earlier than the 960s, and four out of five sources are even younger. This is hardly due to any lack of earlier sources. It is perhaps not coincidental that in such a well-developed genre as homily it is only once in a sermon on the *Book of Judith* that such a meaning can be construed, if at all, and it belonged to Ælfric's pen, i.e. is relatively late.[503]

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the king's high-reeve, and Wulfhere the bishop's thegn, and Godwine of Worthy, Bishop Ælfsige's son, and 81 men in all'; *ASC*: 1001 AD [MS A]).

500 *…alle his þeines ⁊ drenges of Ealondscire ⁊ of Norhamscire* (Liebermann 1903a, p. 283).

501 Tinti 2018, pp. 315–317; Timofeeva 2019, pp. 62–68; Fenton 2021, pp. 429–430, 432.

502 Baxter 2007, pp. 204–215, and esp. p. 225.

503 *Đa com Achior, Holofernes þegen, se ðe ær him gecydde godes gecyðnysse, and him swa aeode, swa swa he him sæde…* ("There came Achior, Holofernes' *thegn*, who previously told him God's manifestation, and it happened to him [= Holofernes] as he [Achior] had said..."; Homilien und Heiligenleben, homily 9, ll. 338–342). In principle, this occurrence can correspond more to the meaning "military commander". Conversely, Holofernes is

Oswald's leases were not the first ones ever, yet it is only here that a non-royal tenant is called a (bishop's) *thegn*. It is worth stressing that for contemporaries the demarcation line between "(free) servant" of a secular lord and "liegeman" might not have existed or been as acutely obvious. In this sense, OE *þegn* with its wide semantics could have been a catch-all term to cover a broad range of conditions and relations that have since been conceptualised as discrete.

In addition, save *Domesday Book* with its discouraging lexical instability, all our extant confirmations that OE *þegn* was applied to actual historical Anglo-Saxon non-royal liegemen (not just literary characters) can be said to have been under a very strong influence of royal ideology and corresponding vocabulary. Though at first sight not as transparent as the documentary genres, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is no exception,[504] and as will be argued later, the annal of 1051 AD might have used OE *þegn* in the sense "(landed proprietor) who owes military royal service", which further weakens the evidence. All in all, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that OE *þegn*'s meaning "non-royal commended man" is situational and can be explained as a direct mimesis of prestigious language of kingship. How much terminological weight it bore otherwise, or simply put, how mundane it was to refer to one's commended man as *thegn*, is very hard to gauge with the sources at hand.

3.3.4 Lord/God's (Earthly) Follower/Servant, Apostle. Disciple. Servant of Devil

Rivalling "(generic) servant" in ubiquity is *thegn* as a "man of God" or "Lord's follower", clearly a calque of LAT. *minister Christi* and *servus/famulus Dei*. This sense is present in all textual formats and types, across 16 genres, in at least 51 sources and 130 individual elements therein. By and large, it is peculiar to religious registers, as there stand out but two exceptions to this pattern.[505] The earliest date when it arose, as much as is discernible from the corpus, could be as early as the 8th century, but the evidence is not without its problems as it comes up in *The Dream of the Rood*. The lines in question (75–77)[506] appear immediately at the end of the first part (ll. 1–77), considered by some to have been written by a different poet than the other half (ll. 78–156). Leonard Neidorf suggests that this fragment misses not only a half-line between *gefrunon* and *gyredon* but also some part before *freondas* and that this could indicate a loss of an original ending in the manuscript copy used by the scribe of the surviving text in the Vercelli Book.[507] Given that certain

not a king, and Ælfric describes him as an ealdorman, who outside the already quoted single mention in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (where OE *eorl* has already replaced OE *ealdormann*: below, p. 199) never get to have their own *thegns* as military commanders. The situation with Holofernes and Achior seems unique in the whole corpus.

504 Brooks 2010, pp. 43–70.

505 *Garmund, Godes ðegen, find þæt feoh and fere þæt feoh and hafa þæt feoh and heald þæt feoh and fere ham þæt feoh* ('Garmund, servant of God, find the cattle and convey the cattle and have the cattle and hold the cattle and convey the cattle home'; Metrical Charms, charm 9 "For Loss of Cattle" [ll. 6–9]); …⁊ *wiþ þon gif mon atter gepicge ⁊ þæs halgan cristes þegnes Iohannes gebed ⁊ gealdor ⁊ eac oþer scyttisc gecost gealdor, gehwæþer wiþ ælcum attre, wiþ fleogendum attre ⁊ swyle ⁊ deopum dolgum* ('...and in case a man swallow poison, and a prayer of the holy thane of Christ, Iohannes, and an incantation and also another Scottish approved incantation, *in Gaelic or Erse*, either of them against every poison, against flying poison and swelling and deep gashes'; Leechdoms, book I, heading 45, p. 10).

506 *Bedealf us man on deopan seaþe; hwæðre me þær Dryhtnes þegnas, freondas gefrunon,* […] *gyredon me golde ond seolfre* ('We were buried in a deep pit; yet the followers of the Lord, his friends, learned about me there [...] they adorned me with gold and silver'; *Dream of the Rood*, ll. 75–77).

507 Neidorf 2016, p. 70.

passages of *The Dream of the Rood* echo the poem on the Ruthwell Cross (*c.* 750 AD), it thus cannot be excluded that *Dryhtnes þegnas* in line 76 could be just as early.[508] Granted, such argumentation is precarious. We are on a safer ground if we assign the formation of the notion of "God/Christ's *thegn*" to the next century, when it occurs not only in poetic pieces (*Christ and Satan*, *Guthlac B*, *Christ II*, *Juliana*, *Elene*) but also in the already mentioned Vespasian Psalter and the Old English *Martyrologium*, the latter dated by Christine Rauer to 'sometime between *c.* 800 and *c.* 900'.[509] Coincidentally or not, the same century witnesses a cognate and fully equivalent formation on the Continent, OS *drohtines thegan*, to refer to the disciples of Jesus.[510]

Thegns of God/Christ break down into three major types. First are Old Testament Biblical figures: Elijah,[511] Enoch,[512] Job[513] and Mattathias,[514] Moses and Aaron,[515] Loth,[516] Joshua and Tobias[517] on various occasions can be styled this way – almost exclusively by Ælfric and occasionally Wulfstan, i.e. late in the period and to a limited extent. Much more prominent, however, is the second group – the twelve apostles, very frequently presented as Christ's *thegns*; similarly, Christ's 70 (72) apostles from Lk 10, too, oftentimes become His *thegns*. Wherever there is a Latin analogue, they almost invariably take the place of LAT. *discipuli*.[518] In the Anglian Rushworth and Lindisfarne Old English glosses to the four Gospels, for example, where a great portion of occurrences OE *þegn* belong (above, p. 83), this parity approaches an all-round state. Curiously, in the West Saxon rendition of the Gospels the anonymous translator preferred the OE compound *leornungcniht* ("student", "pupil": lit. a youth who studies)[519] instead. The third group is more amorphous and includes all other Christians and Lord's worshippers – holy men[520] and bishops, occasionally also other Biblical figures from the New Testament (Zechariah,[521] Ananias of Damascus,[522] Joseph and Nichodemus),[523] disciples of religious figures,[524] or simply Christians in a broad sense.[525]

On the lexical level, *thegnly* servants of God or Christ are overall analogous to secular "servants of a ruler". In common with the latter, verbally, this sense is often conveyed by combining OE *þegn* with the OE gen. *Godes* (God's), *Crīstes* (Christ's), *Dryhtens* (Lord's), *Metodes* (Creator's), *Hǣlendes* (Saviour's), or possessive pronoun *his* when one of such or similar nouns is contextually implied. For good measure, in poetry OE *þēodenes* (lit. prince's,

508 The Ruthwell Cross is a notoriously complex source. The latest exhaustive study and meticulous reconstruction at the time this book was being written is Majewski 2022.
509 Rauer 2013, p. 3.
510 *Hêliand*, ll. 3994 and 5715.
511 *Seasons for Fasting*, XVII, ll. 128–131; *LS* II, *Kings*, ll. 75–77; Nap 42 (21a), 199 (ll. 7–20).
512 Nap 42 (21a), p. 199 (ll. 7–20).
513 *LS* II, *Memory of Saints*, 90; *CH* II.30, ll. 179–186.
514 Letter to Sigeweard, pp. 104, 105.
515 *SH* II.20, ll. 217–225.
516 *SH* II.18, ll. 60–69.
517 *Andreas*, ll. 1513–1516; on Joshua also above, p. 96.
518 On the contextual meaning of LAT. *discipuli* in the New Testament, see Martz 1939, p. 8.
519 On it, see Martz 1939, pp. 55–56.
520 *LS* III, *St Vincent*, ll. 100–102; Old English *Martyrologium*, p. 38 (26 December); *St Nicholas*, pp. 494, 503, 509; *Guthlac B*, ll. 1110–1127.
521 *CH* I.15, ll. 1–5.
522 *CH* I.27, ll. 26–27.
523 *CH* II.14, ll. 340–348; *RG*, Jn 7:50; *LG*, Jn 7:50 and Jn 19:39, headings to Jn 6 and 19.
524 *OEGD*, book I, chap 5, p. 43 (ll. 12–16); book III, chap 5, p. 186 (ll. 7–13).
525 E.g., *SH* II.18, ll. 183–189; *SH* II.19, ll. 9–16; Hirtenbriefe, *First Old English Letter for Wulfstan*, p. 104.

lord's) can seldom be used for purposes of alliteration,[526] which is hardly surprising given that Anglo-Saxon poets frequently assign God and Christ kingly attributes. A peculiar and rare poetic collocation is OE *wuldres þegn* ("servant of glory"),[527] again, probably by extension of another Christian kenning, OE *wuldres cyning*, *wuldorcyning* (lit. king of glory).[528] In other lexical respects Christ's *thegns* behave the same way OE *þegn* does otherwise, too: for example, apostles and angels can become OE *magupegnas* (lit. youth who is a *thegn*)[529] when alliteration and meter call for it. Conversely, if one serves devil, (s)he becomes his *thegn*,[530] though other kennings ("servants of darkness", "servants of punishment") carry the same idea in poetry as well.[531]

We might next ask which sphere – religious or lay – lent its lexis and associated with it concepts to the other. Differently put, did the secular world emulate the spiritual (thus, relationships between servants and chieftains mirror relationships between Christian devotees and higher beings) or the other way around (thus, relationships between Christ and his disciples, God and his worshippers, are modelled off an earthly example)? Two reasons might compel one to prefer the latter direction of influence. For one, secular (and, importantly, king's) *thegns* appear chronologically earlier, for the first time in 7th-century legislation,[532] though, of course, already in the post-conversion era. For the other, OE *þegn* has its cognates in other Germanic languages, including continental Old Saxon and Old High German. The most economical conclusion is thus that it was inherited from some Proto-Germanic stage commonly spoken in the pre-Christian period.

Christian specialisation thus seems a later development.[533] For the intents and purposes of this book, it could have been largely secondary, had there not been an accepted scholarly consensus that, to quote Sara Pons-Sanz,

526 E.g., *Lof wide sprang, miht ond mærðo, ofer middan-geard, þeodnes þegna, þrym unlytel* ('Their glory spread widely, the might and fame of the prince's disciples, no small majesty, across the earth'; *Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 6–8); *We gefrunan on fyrndagum twelfe under tunglum tireadige hæleð, þeodnes þegnas!* ('Much have we heard tell about twelve famous men under the heavens, disciples of the Lord, in days of old!'; *Andreas*, ll. 1–2).

527 *Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 86–91; *Andreas*, ll. 724–727, 1677–1679; *OEMC*, p. 78 (ll. 115–118).

528 Occurs 59 times in the DOEC (Majewski 2022, p. 256).

529 *Andreas*, ll. 1206–1210; *OEMC*, p. 78 (ll. 80–82). Joshua and Tobias in *Andreas* (ll. 1513–1516) are too called *magupegnas*.

530 Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, homily 4, p. 63 (ll. 64–67); *LS* I, *St Sebastian*, ll. 180–182); *CH* I.26, ll. 147–149, 236–239; *CH* I.31, ll. 85–89; *LS* III, *St Agatha*, ll. 166–169; *Andreas*, ll. 41–44; Prayers (1941), p. 252 (l. 5); Prayers (1963), pp. 98 (l. 7), 114 (l. 6).

531 *Næfre þu gelærest þæt ic leasingum, dumbum ond deafum deofol-gieldum, gæsta geniðlum gaful onhate, þam wyrrestum wites þegnum*; and *Þonne he onsendeð geond sidne grund þegnas of þystrum, hateð þræce ræran, gif we gemette sin on mold-wege, oþþe feor oþþe neah fundne weorþen, þæt hi usic binden ond in bæl-wylme suslum swingen* ('You will never teach me to pay tribute to deceiving, dumb and deaf devil-idols, to the enemies of souls, to the worst servants of torment'; 'Then he sends servants of darkness throughout the spacious land, orders them to use violence, if we should be met on earth, or should be found far or near, so that they bind us and insurging fire afflicts us with torments'; *Juliana*, ll. 149–152 and 332–337); *Þrea wæron þearle, þegnas grimme, ealle hy þam feore fyl gehehton*; and *Hæfde Guðlaces gæst in gewealdum modig mund-bora meahtum spedig þeostra þegnas þrea-niedlum bond, nyd onsette ond geneahhe bibead…* ('The misery they inflicted was severe, the devil's followers cruel; they all vowed to destroy his life'; 'This brave protector with his abundant powers had Guthlac's spirit in his protection, and he bound the servants of darkness with painful force, bore down on them violently and strictly charged them...'; *Guthlac A*, ll. 547–548 and 694–697).

532 Ine 45, p. 108; Wit 20, p. 14 (see full texts above, n. 389).

533 *Cf.* Carlton 2019, p. 120.

> [...] the relationship between Humanity and God or the Devil is commonly described in Old English texts in servile terms through imagery drawn from social stratification.[534]

At the same time, it has been shown that in Old English religious literature "God/Christ's *thegns*" co-existed with "God/Christ's slaves" (OE *Godes/Cristes þeōw*[*e*] or similar),[535] which returns the inquiry to the (partial?) overlap between OE *þegn* and *þeōw*. To put it bluntly, was Henry Loyn correct in asserting the dichotomous nature of these two lexemes or, conversely, shall one side with David Pelteret who posited that OE '*þegn* [...] is also found in the sense "slave" in the mid-tenth-century dialect of the Northumbrian scribe Aldred'?[536] The latter case would argue for a synonymity between OE *þegn* and *þeōw* and consequently add important nuance to the current contextual analysis.

The exact relationship between OE *þegn* and *þeōw* and in turn their correspondence to Latin terms is not as unilateral as one may initially believe. For one, *pace* Loyn, OE *þegn* did occasionally stand for LAT. *servus* and *famulus*[537] which in classical and early medieval Latin connoted humbled and enslaved servants, and on a few occasions also for LAT. *puer*. However numerically marginal in comparison with LAT. *minister*, such equivalence cannot be done away with offhandedly: including the already cited passages (above, p. 98), the search in the corpus has returned at least 64 hits. Most of them (25 to be exact), however, occur in the Lindisfarne glosses to the Gospel of Matthew (plus twice in the same glosses to the Gospel of Luke [Lk 14:21, 22] and once in the headings to the same text), which led Pelteret to his conclusion. Yet, upon closer inspection and *pace* Pelteret, cases where OE *þegn* translates LAT. *servus* (and LAT. *famulus*, for that matter, in the LAT. expression *famuli tui* [= *Dei*])[538] occur exclusively in Biblical contexts. Most often no derogatory or *per se* ignoble connotation is implied which is exactly what must have caused hesitation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon translators and necessitated expansions, such at the one noted by Loyn, to prevent ambiguity. On other occasions, "servant of a ruler" is meant[539] which makes the rendition through OE *þegn* fully apropriate. For the other, the level to which OE *þegn* contrasted OE *þeōw* was perhaps highest in prose, whereas, *pace* Loyn again, in poetry the two could complement each other, though largely due to alliteration requirements. In *Phoenix*, for example, '[b]irds throng about that noble one; each of them desires to be follower [*þegn*] and servant [*þeōw*] to that illustrious prince [= the phoenix]'.[540] In *Genesis B* (l. 744), a demon explains the fall of angels because of their unwillingness to "[unreciprocally?] serve [God] in *thegnship*" (*on þegnscipe þeowian*).

In all likelihood, so far, the conclusion reached by Hugh Magennis presents a neat and elegant plausible solution to this controversy. He noted that Anglo-Saxon poets almost

534 Pons-Sanz 2007a, p. 183, who sides with and cites David Pelteret. A very similar thought belongs to Martz 1939, pp. 11–12.

535 See above, nn. 479 and 480.

536 Pelteret 2001, p. 44 (see also his discussion at p. 304 to the same effect). On Aldred, see Cole 2016. *Cf.* Stefan Brink's enumeration of Old English terms for slaves that also includes OE *þegn*, probably replicating Pelteret's list (Brink 2021, p. 62).

537 The latter nine times in the *Durham Collectar*, like the Lindisfarne glosses also written by Aldred but at a slightly later date (Brown et al. 1969, pp. 23–26), once in non-Aldredian glosses to religious hymns (Prayers [1963], p. 100 [l. 10]).

538 *Durham Collectar*, pp. 33, 66, 69 (×3), 70, 73, 90.

539 As in the parable on forgiveness (Mt 18:23–35) in *VH* 14, ll. 121–125, and MS Bodley 343, homily 2, ll. 138–142; or in his retelling of Exod. 7:10, 7:20, 8:3, 8:9–10, 10:6, 12:30, Ælfric makes the pharaoh's *servi* his *thegns* (Heptateuch, pp. 98–99, 103, 107).

540 *Fuglas þringað utan ymbe æþelne; æghwylc wille wesan þegn ond þeow þeodne mærum* (*Phoenix*, ll. 163–165).

ubiquitously transformed "God/Christ's slaves" into "God/Christ's *thegns*" while "God/Christ's slaves" proper come up in prose, the major exception being Ælfric who 'seems to alternate fairly freely between the two expressions'.[541] Magennis theorises that despite that OE *þeōw* used to be the standard stock equivalent of LAT. *servus*, the connotations of servitude and submission, appropriate in Christian context, defied, in the language of Koselleck, the poetry audience's *Erwartungshorizont* ("horizon of expectations") and *Erfahrungsraum* ("space of experience"). Simply put, a protagonist or positive supporting cast could not be a slave in the Anglo-Saxon poetic art. Poets therefore subtly downplayed Christian overtones of submissiveness and humbleness and instead prioritised in LAT. *servus Dei/Christi* 'connotations of loyalty and of a privileged position on the part of the person to whom it is applied, in relation to the divine Ruler', appropriate in "Germanic" heroic literature.[542] The prose tradition, conversely, not as strictly bound by the genre conventions 'and conceptual superstructure of the poetry',[543] allowed for a more verbatim and faithful adaptation of the Abrahamic religious notion of one's unreserved commitment to God.

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The conclusions of this analysis are thus two. First, Loyn appears to have been correct in observing the Anglo-Saxon *thegn*'s free status and, if not dignity of service, then at least the lack of indignity, pertinent to slavery. Much of the evidence for the meaning "slave" (LAT. *servus*, *famulus*) can be a consequence not as much of its ubiquity in Northumbria but as of a particular individual's, the glossator Aldred's, idiolect, just like Ælfric's interchangeability between God's *þeōw* and *þegn*. Second, with due acknowledgement of Old English poetic conservatism,[544] the date of Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity (broadly the 7th century), and OE *þegn*'s cognates in other Germanic languages, including the OS *drohtines thegan*, the lexical and ideological conflict that Anglo-Saxon poets must have been struggling with when naturalising the idea of a "slave of God/Christ"[545] gestures to an early date when secular chieftains' retinues started passing as *thegns*. This inference fits well with other observations on OE *þegn*, elucidated throughout the current chapter.

3.3.5 Servant of a Supernatural Being: Angel/Demon

Similar observations apply when supernatural servants of God and, conversely, Satan become *thegns*. This sense, best reflected in terms "angel" and "demon", is not widely attested, and appeared only 37 times on the search, in all textual formats, three types

541 Magennis 1998, p. 159. Ælfric's homily on the *Book of Job* serves a prime illustration to this statement. When retelling Job 42:7–8, whereas the Vulgate preserves LAT. *servus* all the while, the Abbot makes Job God's *thegn* when in third person but a *þeōw* in the mouth of God (*CH* II.30, ll. 181–187). It may be that such lexical variation was intended to add nuance in subtly distinguishing between what Magennis termed "honorific" and "precatory" slavery. On Ælfric's general treatment of the Old Testament material, see Anderson 2007.

542 Some reflections on the influence early Christianity exercised on the Old English oral poetic culture are laid out in Niles 2007, pp. 22–27. For literature on the accommodation of Christian values into this heroic literary culture, see references in n. 22 at p. 22. A previous study in the same vein, more specifically on the use of the *comitatus* conceptual field when reworking Genesis, is Lucas 1992. A comparison with Old Saxon welding of "Germanic" and Christian ethos is a study by Woods 1985 (esp. pp. 146–150).

543 Magennis 1998, pp. 149, 154.

544 Amodio 2014, pp. 137–146 (esp. pp. 142–143). This is, of course, no way to be confused for fixedness or staticism. See some examples to the contrary in Richardson 1999, pp. 224–228; Tyler 2006, pp. 237–250.

545 It must be noted, though, that the antagonistic or dichotomic relationship between "Germanic" and "Christian" ideologies should, in light of recent scholarly criticism (Angerer 2021), be viewed with due reservation.

(glosses, religious poetry, and religious prose), seven genres, and 14 individual sources. Despite this seeming diversity, the majority occurred in religious poetry,[546] whereas glosses and religious prose contained only two and three occurrences respectively.[547]

Substantially angels and demons as *thegns* of divine forces add relatively little to the previous section. Like God and Christ's *thegns*, they can be verbally introduced through the OE collocation *wuldres þegn* (lit. *thegn* of glory).[548] And like the former, the latter are well-situated in the Tacitean *comitatus* conceptual framework. Its reciprocal nature is best revealed in *Genesis B* when Satan addressess his demons in his plan to corrupt Adam and Eve:

> If I ever gave any of you [= any *thegn*] precious treasures, gems or gold, when we held our thrones in the realm of heaven, then now is the time to repay my gifts if you [= any of my *thegns*] desire to do it...[549]

Its military nature is well-exemplified in *Guthlac B* (ll. 1068–1069) when demons are referred to as a 'hostile troop of attendants [= *thegns*] from hell' (*here-hloðe helle þegna*[*s*]) and *Christ II* (ll. 746–751) when humans are exhorted to keep fast to Christian faith so that they can 'ascend to the highest summit through holy works where there is hope and bliss, a perfect host of attendants [= *thegns*]'.[550] This leads the contextual analysis to the next discernible meaning.

3.3.6 Warrior/Soldier. Military Commander

By itself, OE *þegn*'s semantics communicates few, if any, martial or bellicose connotations. But when genres and situations call for it, *thegns* who serve secular rulers easily act in military capacity. This meaning is also widespread and can be found both in prose and poetry, religious and secular, in 13 genres. Its single occurrence in glosses comes up in the Rushworth Gospels (*c.* 950×1000 AD), when in Jn 19:2 Roman soldiers (LAT. *milites*) put a crown of thorns on Jesus's head.[551] Contrary to the generic "(free) servant", outside the documentary genre and its free variation between LAT. *minister* and *miles* as late as 1042 AD,[552] *thegn* as a military man does not survive into the phase of Old English after Wulfstan and Ælfric. But not unlike it, a warrior *thegn* seems to have been a very early development, if one concedes *Beowulf*'s composition before *c.* 725 AD.

In the latter poem, in fact, this prime example of a Tacitean *comitatus* spirit and ideology, distinguishing between *thegns* as servants of a chieftain (Beowulf, Hrothgar, etc.) and his warriors is extremely difficult. As alluded to above, they combine the two roles in the narrative of the poem. Other cases, even in poetry, can be easier to tackle. When in *Andreas* (*c.* 875/886–899 AD) a crowd turns on a boy and seeks to kill him, the poet leaves little doubt that the blood-thirsty *maguþegnas* (i.e. the crowd) are indeed armed men, and,

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546 *Andreas*, *Solomon and Saturn*, *Christ and Satan*, *Daniel*, *Genesis A* and *B*, *Juliana*, *Christ II*, *Guthlac A* and *B*.

547 Vitelius Psalter and Paris Psalter, Psalm 103 [104]:5; *Durham Collectar,* p. 70; Five Old English Homilies, homily 5, p. 178 (ll. 76–79); Confessional Prayers, p. 106.

548 *Andreas*, ll. 1026–1028, 1675–1679; *Genesis A*, ll. 1575–1581; 2268–2272; 2567–2571.

549 *Gif ic ænegum þægne þeodenmadmas geara forgeafe, þenden we on þan godan rice gesælige sæton and hæfdon ure setla gewealdˌ þonne he me na on leofran tid leanum ne meahte mine gife gyldan, gif his gien wolde minra þegna hwilc geþafa wurðan…* (*Genesis B*, ll. 409–414).

550 *…to þam hyhstan hrofe gestigan halgum weorcum, þær is hyht ond blis, geþungen þegn-weorud. Cf.* the apposition of OE *þegn* and *werod* below, n. 564.

551 *WSG*, Mt 20:26; *RG*, Jn 19:2. Curiously, out of 12 times the Gospels use *miles*, both Rushworth glossators, Farman and Owun, otherwise preferred OE *cempa* and once (Mt 27:27) *geroefa* (= West Saxon *gerēfa*).

552 S 999.

importantly, they are not attached to any one ruler.[553] The Biblical centurion in Mt 8:9 has *thegns* in place of the LAT. *milites* under his command (*ic hæbbe þegnas under me* in the West Saxon synoptic version, *ic* […] *hæfo under mec ðeignas ł innheardmenn* in the Anglian interlinear translation) who obey his orders.[554] When the Syrian governor Lysias intends to quel the Jewish rebellion, he gathers sixty five thousand *thegns*.[555] A prefect of Milan orders a *thegn* by the name of Nicostratus to guard two oppressed Christians.[556]

This military association is very pronounced in vernacular translations of Latin texts on war. Two primary examples are perhaps the Old English *Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle* (broadly the 10th century) and the Alfredian free adaptation of Paul Orosius's *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* ("Seven Books of History Against the Pagans"). In the former, extolling Alexander's military exploits and thus situated in martial contexts, OE *þegn* replaces the original LAT. *miles* on all occasions save one. In the latter, the translator indulged themselves with a fair deal of liberty in his handling of the source, so this lexical equivalence is upset. But the martial overtones surrounding *thegns* are unmistakable. In the fight against the Romans, one of Viriatus's *thegns* gets his horse killed under him (book V, chap 2). When asked by one of his *thegns* for the causes of his desperation, King Pyrrhus famously replies that should he win another battle like the one at Asculum, he shall return home without a single *thegn* (book IV, chap 1). Twice does the Anglo-Saxon author in their departures from the Latin original allow themselves ironic remarks on the Romans' military qualities of *thegns* (book III, chap 13; book IV, chap 9). Even if texts themselves do not deal with bellicose subjects but use LAT. *miles*, some Old English translators had no reservations in making such characters *thegns*. A telling example can be found in the Alfredian version of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*: Bishop Fortunatus of Todi works miracles and calms down a horse of a certain *miles*, here styled *thegn*; another *miles*, again explained through OE *þegn*, dies in book IV.[557]

Some sources make their *thegns* not just men of war but military leaders. This occurs first and foremost in Old English adaptation of Orosius. The anonymous translator turns into *thegns* the generals Carthaginian Hanno, Roman Scipio Africanus, Persian Mardonius, and Macedons Parmenion, Ptolemy, and Polyperchon. What can explain such a leap from "(free) servant" to not just "warrior" but "military commander"?

It seems that the pivotal point lies in Alfredian prose and epoch. Most of the vernacular sources for the time are, one or another way, monarchocentric. Therefore, a discussion of whether they reflected the actual social order or sought to impose kings' vision of how such order should be and thus mould it[558] might potentially lead a modern reader in circles. Whichever the answer, in the process of running his West Saxon kingdom Alfred heavily relied on what has been cautiously defined above (§1.5.2.1) as a *comitatus* in the

553 *Andreas*, ll. 1139–1143. Including *mago-* as the first element of a compound is necessitated by metre and need for alliteration with the preceding word, *mōdige*.

554 *WSG* and *LG*, Mt 8:9. OE *inhirdmann* is best understood as "bodyguard". It is connected to OE *hīred*, which, just as OE *þegn*, figures promptly in *comitatus* contexts (Lindow 1976, pp. 42–52). The Rushworth Gospels read OE *cempa* in the same fragment. This is a prime example when context could have confused the translator, since the centurion gives similar orders to both his soldiers and slaves. But since the Vulgate uses two words, LAT. *miles* and *servus*, the Anglo-Saxon scribe consistently used OE *þegn* for the former and OE *þeōw* for the latter.

555 *LS* III, *St Vincent*, ll. 363–365.

556 *LS* I, St Sebastian, ll. 32–34.

557 *OEGD*, book I, chap 10, p. 77–78 (ll. 30–28); book IV, chap 38, p. 318 (ll. 17–26).

558 Richardson 1999 (esp. pp. 217–220).

sense proposed by Mitteis – first of all a tight cohort of agents, with a heroic ethos coming second as presumably a feature of the ideal world.[559] The top tier, the ealdormen, governed the largest administrative units of Wessex, the shires. The 9th-century ealdormen, so much as we can trust prosopographic identifications of namesakes in royal diplomas,[560] were generally recruited from among a broader lower tier that passed as (most commonly) LAT. *ministri* and OE *þegnas*. Crucially, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Alfred's *thegns* fight independently and even lead expeditions on his behalf.[561] Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the famous annal of 755 AD in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* with its vivid recounting of a strife between two West Saxon dynasts that involved their armed supporters[562] testify to the likely existence of such retinues around Anglo-Saxon kings, or, to hedge our bets, of such notions. Bede, in his original Latin writing from 731 AD, predominantly calls these followers LAT. *ministri* or *milites*, and, as said above, the Alfredian translator consistently calls them *thegns*. Noteworthily, in the contexts they occur, Bede's LAT. *milites* can be seamlessly swapped for LAT. *ministri* because they often figure in non-military situations, but the change in the opposite direction is more problematic. The Alfredian chronicler, too, describes the West Saxon princes' retinues in 755 AD as *thegns*.

King's *thegns* of Alfred's reign thus represent a direct descendant of an age-old social phenomenon, or, safer to say, its language and conceptual framework. Essentially, they differ from their counterparts in, for instance, *Beowulf* only in scale in accordance with the changed scale of power of their chieftain. Various roles such *thegns* take directly mirror the power of the lord. In *Beowulf*, *thegns* fight side by side with him. In the *Letter of Alexander*, they can be both Alexander's rank-and-file soldiers, which follows the original rather closely,[563] but also his, so to speak, general staff. This becomes obvious when Alexander's *thegns* are verbally distinguished from the rest of the army, not found in the Latin text:

> Then I enjoined my officers and commanded that they arm themselves with their weapons and set out with the army. And likewise my veterans and my officers and my entire army, since they had seized a large quantity of gold and precious stones, transported and brought it with them, because they suspected and feared that if they left it behind, their enemies would get hold of it by stealth and carry it away. And my officers and likewise all my veterans were so very enriched that only with difficulty could they carry off and bring along the entire burden of gold. Likewise there was no small encumbrance of weapons, since I had ordered that all the weapons of my officers and of all my veterans and army be embellished with gold plate. [my emphasis][564]

559 Woolf 1976, 63–81; Evans 1997; Stratyner 1991; Prietzel 2005, to name only some select reading.

560 Pratt 2007, pp. 28–34.

561 *ASC*: 871 (MSS A, D, E; St Neot's)/872 AD (MSS B, C); 893 (MS A)/894 AD (MSS B, C, D); 895 (MS A)/896 AD (MSS C, D).

562 On it and for discussion, see White 1989; Kleinschmidt 1996; Bremmer 1997; Richardson 1999, pp. 218–219; Hill 2000, pp. 74–92; Leneghan, 2010; Irvine 2015; Niles 2015b, pp. 194–195. This otherwise uncharacteristic of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* account has been variously assessed, from a splinter of a lost source to an invention by Alfred's ideologists. In any case, the details differ significantly from the representation of Alfred's own court. At the very least in front of a modern reader lies a late 9th-century conceptualisation of early Anglo-Saxon retinues.

563 Of whom hundreds can be a single casualty: *Ond ic þær þa bebyrgde minra þegna .v. hund þe ðær betweoh ða snawas ond earfeþo ond þa fyr þe us þær in þæm wicum on becwoman þæt hie forwurdon ond deade wæron* ('And there I buried five hundred of my officers who had perished there and lay dead between the snows and mishaps and the fires that had visited us in that camp'; *Letter of Alexander*, p. 68); *Et ego sepultis admodum .D.tis. militibus qui inter niues perierunt castra deinde mutare imperaui* (Rypins 1924, p. 92).

564 *Ða bebead ic minum þegnum ond hie het þæt hie hie mid heora wæpnum gereden, ond mid þy herige ford ferdon, ond hie eac swylce þæt m i n w e o r o d o n d þ a m i n e þ e g n a s o n d e a l m i n h e r e goldes eorcnansfeana þæt hie gehergad, ond*

In summation, the meaning "warrior" appears to have been a natural offshoot of a particular case when a *thegn* who was in service of a chieftain took arms.[565] The "promotion" of such, figuratively speaking, private to a general follows the growth of power of his royal liege.

3.3.7 Mode of Conduct (**Thegnly**)

This particular case of bellicose connotations found itself embedded in the suffixed adjective and adverb, OE *þegenlīc*(*e*) ("as befits a *thegn*": lit. *thegn*-like). Both are numerically rare and came up only a total of 12 times, almost exclusively in Ælfric's Christian prose, with merely three exceptions elsewhere: the homiletic *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (1014 AD) by Wulfstan, the documentary S 1462 (Rob 78), and the heroic poetry of *The Battle of Maldon*.

Ælfric's handling OE *þegenlīc*(*e*) revolves around warlike manliness.[566] The masculine attribute of *thegnly* behaviour gets additionally emphasised when he renders LAT. *viriliter age* (lit. act manfully!) in the Jews' acceptance of Joshua's leadership (Josh. 1:18) as *hycg þegenlīce* (lit. think *thegnly*!)[567] and when he explains that "Andrew"[568] means *thegnly* and then recursively likens the Christian who *thegnly* 'for the name of God, endures hardship, and manfully withstands the temptations of the devil' to Andrew.[569]

The three mentioned exceptions deviate from Ælfric's use and relate more to an individual's moral qualities. In *The Battle of Maldon* this aspect is at first sight, perhaps, least pronounced, because the poet brings up *thegnly* behaviour again in a martial context:

> And there Gadd's kinsman went to ground: quickly in the battle Offa was cut down; nevertheless he had accomplished what he had promised his lord, what he had vowed to his

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ge numen hæfdon micel gemet mid him wægon ond læddon. For þon hie wendon ond ondredon gif hie hit behindon forleton þæt hiora fynd hit þonne deagollice genomon ond onweg aleddon. Ond efne swiðe þa mine þegnas ond eall min weorod wæs gewelgod þæt hie uneðe ealle þa byrðene þæs goldes mid him aberan ond alæðan meahton. Swelce eac heora wæpena noht lytel byrðen wæs for þon eal heora wæpenu þæra minra þegna, ond ealles mines weoredes ond heriges ic hie mid gyldenum þelum bewyrcean (*Letter of Alexander*, pp. 42–45).

565 David Carlton, too, sees the military sense as a later development off a more general "servant" in both Old English an Old Saxon (Carlton 2019, pp. 119–120, 125–126). A different opinion was expressed by Dennis Green who maintained that, '*thegan* had possessed a military function in Germanic in addition to its meaning of "servant"' (Green 1965, p. 103). Green argued against Karl Guntermann's surmise that, 'the military overtones of *thegan* can only have come from its being incorporated into the vocabulary of feudalism' (at p. 102) and instead insisted that the 'word seems therefore to have had two meanings ("warrior" and "servant"), both deriving from an original meaning of "young man"' (at p. 104). Green's line of reasoning finds objections. Leaving aside the problems of etymology (see EXCURSUS 1) and feudalism, such explanation virtually leads into circular argumentation, for in fact the sense "young man" is construed not only through the comparison with the GR. τέκνον, but from the actually attested meanings themselves. The examples Green brought forth to support his case could rather attest later phases of semantic evolution (*Hêliand* and Otfrid are 9th-century authorities, the Lindisfarne and Rushworth glosses even later, not to mention skaldic poetry) such as the one proposed above or be contextually conditioned (as in *Beowulf*).

566 Antiochus' men 'valiantly fought' (*ðegenlice hi fuhton*) the Jews in the Maccabean Revolt (*LS* II, *The Martyrdom of the Maccabees*, l. 325); a general (*heretoga*) rejoices when a warrior (*cempa*) valiantly 'overcomes his adversary' (*his wiþerwinnan þegenlice oferwinð*) and values him greater than the one who never 'in any conflict performed any deed of valour' (*naht þegenlices ne gefremode*; *CH* I.24, ll. 64–66); forty soldiers of Sebaste 'bravely [...] suffered for Christ' (*þegenlice hi þrowodon for Criste*; *LS* I, *Forty Soldiers*, l. 3); a Mercian warrior refused to repent for his sins even in the face of a deadly sickness for the fear of accusations of opportunism and believed that he spoke "*thegnly* words" ([*h*]*im þuhte þæt he spræce þegenlice word*; *SH* II.19, ll. 156–158).

567 Heptateuch, p. 177.

568 GR. Ἀνδρέας < ἀνδρεῖος "courageous", "manly" < ἀνδρός, "man" (as opposed to woman), gen. sing. masculine.

569 …*nu wille we eow secgan þa getacnunge þæra feowera apostola namana þe crist æt fruman geceas* […] *andreas* [*is*] *þegenlic* […] *þegenlice for godes naman earfoðnysse forberð; ⁊ werlice deofles costnungum wiðstent* (*CH* I.38, ll. 151–164). The "manly" component is further reinforced through apposition to OE *werlīce* (lit. manfully < OE *wer*, lit. male person). On this etymology and Ælfric's approach to this translation, see DeGregorio 2003, pp. 456–457.

> ring-giver: that they would both either ride back to the *burh* [= lordly residence], safe to their home, or fall in the conflict on the battlefield and die of their wounds; he lay there in a thegnly manner close to his *theoden* [= prince, lord].[570]

Notwithstanding, this episode extols the Tacitean *comitatus* values, and thus the *thegnly* manner in which Offa fell next to Ealdorman Byrhtnoth describes his unwavering, suicidal loyalty and inviolacy of his oath. Wulfstan's understanding of *thegnly* ways has to do with notions of uprightness. In his exposition of the woeful social conditions and moral degradation at the close of King Æthelred's reign, the prelate laments in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* that,

> [...] almost everyone has deceived and injured another by word or deed; and in particular almost everyone wrongly [and *unthegnly*] stabs another in the back with shameful attack – let him do more, if he can.[571]

It is clear that for Wulfstan *thegnly* behaviour hinges on honesty and integrity. It is exactly the sense that can be deduced in the last specimen under discussion, S 1462. This document contains a rare record of an outcome of a pre-Conquest litigation that unfolded in the Herefordshire court sometime in King Cnut's reign, according to the charter's own attribution. One Edwin sued his own mother for the estates of Wellington and *Crydesleah* (Herefs.). She rejected his claim, presented counterarguments, and pleaded the three local *thegns*, who had been appointed by the court for adjudication, to act *thegnly* (OE *dōþ þegenlīce!*) when passing her statement and will back to the court.

In summary, Anglo-Saxon *thegnliness* seems to connote honour and respective behaviour in an ethical sense, and presupposes traditional "masculine virtues" which sit at home in many a patriarchal society that expected military prowess and moral righteousness of its men.

A few mutually intertwined facts emerge. One is how late such habitus becomes verbally associated with *thegns* in form of a one-word adjective/adverb, despite numerous attestations of OE *þegn* in earlier texts and, as surmised above at p. 107, its early circulations in Tacitean *comitatus* contexts. The Alfredian literary corpus, which precedes *The Battle of Maldon* well by a century, contains at least two narratives on Anglo-Saxon history that come very close to Offa's *thegnliness* and moreover call the actors *thegns*. Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* reports a failed assault on King Eadwine's (r. 616–632 or 633) life prevented by a *minister regis* Lilia, who threw himself between the king and the assassin upon spotting a blade (*HE*, book II, chap 9). An Alfredian vernacular translator, expectedly, makes Lilia a *cyninges þegn* and, importantly, changes his relationship with the monarch from *regi amicissimus* ("most friendly/dear to the king") to *him se holdesta* ("the most devoted to him [= the king]").[572] And in the aforementioned feud between Cynewulf and Cyneheard in 755 AD, the chronicler lays into the mouths of Cynewulf's *thegns* rejection of Cyneheard's offer of pardon and compensation for their lord's death, so that they die avenging him. The next

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570 *And ðær Gaddes mæg grund gesohte: rade wearð æt hilde Offa forheawen; he hæfde ðeah geforþod þæt he his frean gehet, swa he beotode ær wið his beahgifan þæt hi sceoldon begen on burh ridan, hale to hame, oððe on here cringan, on wælstowe wundum sweltan; he læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende* (*Battle of Maldon*, ll. 287–294).

571 *…mæst ælc swicode ⁊ oðrum derede wordes ⁊ dæda; ⁊ huru unrihtlice ⁊ unþegenlice mæst ælc oðerne æftan heaweð mid scandlican onscitan, do mare gyf he mæge* (*Sermo Lupi*, ll. 75–77; the version from the CCCC MS 201).

572 *OEHE*, book II, chap 8, p. 122. The episode is later recycled in the Peterborough version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (*s.a.* 626 AD), and in it, Lilia's identification as *thegn* is preserved intact. This entry belongs to one of the many interpolations in the Peterborough chronicle and likely stems from the so-called 'Northern Recension, a version of the "Common stock" without any continuations, which was taken north in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries' (Home 2015, p. 1; a new edition and commentary in the first volume on the Peterborough chronicle is by Muir and Sparks 2023).

morning, a bigger group of Cynewulf's *thegns* arrives and turns down Cyneheard's peace proposal once again, despite him pointing out that his retinue included their relatives. Cynewulf's *thegns* 'replied that no kinsman was dearer to them than their lord, and they would never serve his slayer' and offered Cyneheard's men safe passage, in turn rejected by the latter with reference to Cynewulf's retainers' loyalty a day prior. To all appearances thus, notions of *thegnly* "manly" virtues had been well-entrenched by Wulfstan and Ælfric's time. Yet, even though the OE suffix *-līc* used to be productive throughout the whole Old English period, as were its cognates in other Germanic languages,[573] the verbal expression of such behavioural nobility, captured in one word, seems to have taken shape only by the 990s. Tellingly, where in *SH* II.19 Ælfric used OE *þegenlīce word* to translate Bede's original LAT. *fortiter locutus*,[574] an Alfredian translator some hundred years earlier preferred a different, more verbatim formulation altogether: 'it seemed to him, that he spoke boldly and bravely'.[575] The other curiosity in connexion with *thegnliness* is the scantiness of this idea in sources, which will be addressed later below.

3.3.8 Thegnship

Another numerically rare (merely 12 occurrences) suffixed formation is the hard to uniformly translate OE *þegnscipe*: lit. *thegnship*.

Except for the poetic *Genesis B* (three times), OE *þegnscipe* comes up exclusively in the prose format, equally distributed between religious and secular types, in nine unique sources and ten individual elements therein. This section shall for the moment skip two of them. One, the so-called *Canons of Edgar*, is by Archbishop Wulfstan who, as argued before, had a vested interest in *thegnship*. The other is King Edgar's Andover code from the early 960s and is best saved for the discussion of social rather than literary implications around Anglo-Saxon *thegns*.

We first find the earliest attestations of literary *thegnship* in the 9th century in contexts that leave no ambiguity, yet meanings vary from text to text.

In the already quoted (above, n. 488) *Martyrologium*, *thegnship* denotes a ruler's retinue: St Adrian (d. 304?) is said to have been 'head of the guard of the emperor called Maximian'.[576] The suggested meaning "retinue" is confirmed not only through the Old English textual surrounding but the Latin source the Anglo-Saxon translator worked with: in the original *Passio S. Hadriani et sociorum*, the saint figures as *prior officii*.[577] In *Genesis B*, *thegnship* rather signifies (devout) service of a *thegn* in respect of a lord. Fallen angels twice renounced their loyalty and duties to God, and at the climax of the poem, upon the expulsion from the garden of Eden, Adam laments that after the forfeit of his lord's (= God's) favour, he has "no need in any *thegnship* in the world".[578] Finally, in the Old English adaptation of

573 A similar formation, *theganlîc*, with exactly the same meaning ("nobly", "manly") is attested in Old Saxon as early as the 9th century in the Vatican Genesis (*theganlîca githâht*, "brave, courageous thought" [l. 130]; see further Carlton 2019, p. 124).

574 *HE*, book V, chap 13, p. 498.

575 *…him gesegen wæs, þæt heardlice ⁊ stronglice spræce* (*OEHE*, book V, chap 13, p. 439).

576 *…he wæs ðæs caseres ðegnscipes ealdorman, ðe Maximianus wæs nemned* (Old English *Martyrologium*, p. 60 [4 March]).

577 *BHL* 3744. The Latin text has been published in Mombritius, 1910, I, pp. 22–30; quote from p. 23 (l. 47).

578 *Wite þoliað, hatne heaðowelm helle tomiddes, brand and brade ligas, swilce eac þa biteran recas, þrosm and þystro, forþon hie þegnscipe godes forgymdon…*; *ac unc gegenge ne wæs þæt wit him on þegnscipe þeowian wolden…*; *Nis me on worulde niod æniges þegnscipes, nu ic mines þeodnes hafa hyldo forworhte, þæt ic hie habban ne mæg* ('For their strife they suffer singe and smoke, ice and fire, unending torment, because they denied their duty to their Lord'; 'But it was not our want to render him homage'; *Genesis B*, ll. 323–327, 743–744, 835–837). I allow myself to not

Orosius, *thegnship* is the military skill with which Alexander subdued the rebellious Greeks and the military prowess for which Alexander later graciously restituted Porus as king.[579] Here OE *þegnscipe* stands for LAT. *virtus* on both occasions.[580]

In the next century, only Ælfric continued this lexical-semantic tradition in his paraphrase on the *Books of the Maccabees*, and he does so only once. Similarly to how he translates LAT. *viriliter age* with *hycg þegenlīce* in Josh. 1:18 (above, p. 111), so does the prelate render LAT. *viriliter agite in lege* (1 Macc. 2:64: lit. act [plur.] manly in law!), part of Mattathias's precept on his deathbed, as *healdað mid ðegenscipe ða halgan Godes æ*[581] ("hold the holy law of God with a *thegn*'s attitude"). Ælfric's *thegnship* is thus fully consistent with his understanding of *thegnly* qualities elsewhere: steadfast "manliness", commitment to a higher cause, albeit here not as overtly circumstantiated by militantism.

The intermediate conclusion must be that to Ælfric and earlier Old English writers, *thegnship* firmly belonged to the Tacitean *comitatus* on various linguistic levels. On a side note, it should be mentioned that there existed an immediate continental cognate, OS *theganskepi*, also attested in the 9th century. And while it occurs only twice, its meaning is unmistakable and unequivocally shared with *Genesis B*,[582] which should hardly surprise given the commonality of the theme of loyalty in both poems.[583] OE *þegnscipe* could thus have been either a native formation off a common root and suffix independent from similar formations in other Germanic languages, or inherited from Proto-Germanic and thus common with them. Either way, semantical convergence of OE *þegnscipe* and OS *theganskepi* is highly revealing.

Around the year 1000 AD, *thegnship* develops an additional undertone of affluence and cherished secular social status. This, at first sight, might appear out of the preceding conceptual field. But, with due attention to context, contradictions fade, as it transpires that these notions are linked with of notions of office-holding, in Anglo-Saxon practice manifest in royal service. Homily 7 in the 12th-century manuscript Bodley 343 (Oxford), recycled a passage from a sermon by Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) who encouraged his audience to consider the transience of worldly values by looking at tombs of rich people (LAT. *divites*) and deliberating,

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quote Shippey's translation of the last passage for his lexical choice that does not quite convey the sense and overtones required in the present context.

579 *And his æresta þegnscipe on þon gecydde, þa he ealle Crecas mid his snyttro on his geweald geniedde, ealle þa þe wið hyne gewinn up ahofon…*; *…and him eft his rice to forlet for his þegnscipe, þy he swa swiðe wæs feohtende angean hine* ('He showed his warrior skills at once, when by his cunning he compelled all the Greeks who waged war against him to submit to him'; '...but gave his kingdom back to him because of his warrior qualities in fighting so strongly against him'; *OEOr*, book III, chap 9:12, pp. 182, 194).

580 *Alexander* […] *primam experientiam animi et virtutis suae compressis celeriter Graecorum motibus dedit*, and *quo ob testimonium virtutis in regnum restituto* (*Orosius*, book III, chaps 16:1 and 19:4).

581 *LS* II, *The Martyrdom of the Maccabees*, l. 259.

582 Foreshadowing Judas's betrayal, Jesus tells the apostles: '"Listen, I promised you God's kingdom, the light of heaven," He said, "and you devotedly promised Me your thaneship. Now, you are not willing to carry it out, you are not being true to your word"' (*"huat, ik iu godes rîki", quað he, "gihêt himiles lioht, endi gi mi holdlîco iuuuan theganskepi. Nu ni uuilliat gi athengean sô, ac uuenkeat thero uuordo"*), and prophesying Peter's denial, Jesus foresees that, 'You will desert Me, my warrior-companions, and your thaneship, before this dark night leaves people and the light of morning comes back to mankind' (*gi sculun mi gesuîkan, gesîðos mîne, iuuues theganscepies, êr than thius thiustrie naht liudi farlîða endi eft lioht cume, morgan te mannun*; *Hêliand*, ll. 4572–4575 and 4667–4670).

583 Loyalty and obedience form if not *the* crux then at least *a* crux of *Genesis B*. As argued by Lucas 1992, moreover, unlike in the textual surrounding (*Genesis A*) into which ll. 235–851 (*Genesis B*) were integrated, these two qualities generate a complimentary, perhaps inseparable even, bond.

> [...] where are their riches, where are their embellishments, where are their rings and earrings, where are their precious crowns, where is their vanity of honours, where are their joy of luxuries, where are their spectacles – either mad, or cruel, or shameful?[584]

The Anglo-Saxon adaptor condensed Caesarius's enumeration to "their wealth, their gold, and their *thegnship*, and their worldly pride of idleness".[585] Elucidating the exact correspondence between *thegnship* on this list and Caesarius's particular Latin equivalent is upset by the two possible ways the translator handled the source. If (s)he, as suggested by Susan Irvine, used shorter expressions as umbrella concepts, then *heore gold* most logically includes *ornamenta*, *anuli*, *inaures*, and *diademata pretiosa*, and therefore *þegenscype* likely renders only *honorum vanitas*. LAT. *honor* is a word of many meanings and subtle nuances that, in both classical and medieval use, can denote literally "honour" but also, from very early on, tied with it "(public) office".[586] If this is the case, arguments can be mustered about an element of literal service still embedded in OE *þegnscipe*. As late as 1010×1012 AD Byrhtferth of Ramsey uses this lexeme in an unrelated context and abstract sense: a miscalculation can cause a fourteen-day-old Moon's appearance in the sky 'one day before than its proper service'.[587] Alternatively, the Bodley translator could have 'departed from any close adherence to Caesarius, choosing own phrases from a traditional stock'.[588] On this reading, *honorum vanitas* equates with *worldprude þære ydelnesse* which is lexically more probable. Perhaps, it is altogether misleading to try to sever this dialectal positive feedback loop – royal service promotes one's social standing, and people of higher social status additionally consolidate their position by seeking royal service – so organically accommodated and conflated in OE *þegnscipe*.

3.3.9 (*Occupational*) *Status/Title*

A few late sources use OE *þegn* in the syntactical thematic-rhematic appositional construction "personal name [+ *se*] + common noun". On Old English material, this linguistic phenomenon was studied by, e.g., the Polish scholar Elżbieta Sielanko-Byford, and so this section builds on her conclusions.[589] In short, the examined construction can (but does not have to) convey discourse-new information about a referent in a given cultural environment and does not connect the referent to prior knowledge or discourse.

Only in seven[590] instances does OE *þegn* figure in such a construction. Three of them are by Ælfric and indicated a referent's occupation as is. In a paraphrase of Josh. 7, the Abbot mentions Achan son of Carmi who looted from the spoils of Jericho in contravention of Joshua's prohibition. Ælfric refers to him as *Achan se þegen þe mid Josue feaht* (lit. Achan the *Thegn* who fought with Joshua).[591] Given the military context, the preferred understanding

584 *…ubi sunt illorum divitiae, ubi ornamenta, ubi anuli vel inaures, ubi diademata pretiosa, ubi honorum vanitas, ubi luxoriae voluptas, ubi spectacula vel furiosa vel cruenta vel turpia* (MS Bodley 343, homily 7, p. 197).

585 *…heoræ wælan, heore gold, and heore þegenscypæs, and heore worldprude þære ydelnesse* (MS Bodley 343, homily 7, p. 197 [ll. 3–4]).

586 Lewis and Short 1879, pp. 861–862 (*s.v.* "hŏnor or hŏnos"); Niermeyer 2002, I, pp. 647–651 (*s.v.* "honor").

587 *…anum dæge ær his riht þegenscipe sy* (*Enchiridion*, pt II, chap 1, p. 64 [l. 136]) – *cf.* comments at p. 465 in the same edition [*s.v.* "þegnescipe"]). I must admit that the intricacies of Byrhtferth's language, in this line specifically, elude my throughout comprehension. The context yields little to explicate why the author thought of the Moon's course (called *ryne* and *weg* in the same passage) as *thegnship*.

588 Irvine 1993, p. 184; discussion of the date, sources, and possible reworking by the translator at pp. 181–196.

589 Sielanko-Byford 2015.

590 Eight, if one adds a metathetic variant in S 566 (below, n. 937).

591 Hexameron, p. 53.

of Achan's occupation is that of a warrior. On a different occasion, Ælfric uses the same construction in respect of another Biblical figure from the *Book of Esther*, Mordecai. His choice of words and reasons for it are fully comprehensible: Mordecai personally served King Ahasuerus, so calling him *Mardocheus se þegen* begs no question.[592] Similarly little surprise poses Ælfric's entitling of Æthelmær, the son of the famous chronicler Ealdorman Æthelweard, when the Abbot calls him Æthelmær the *Thegn*,[593] because he indeed served as a *minister* to King Æthelred.[594]

The other four instances conspicuously belong to the documentary genre and are all late. The statement by Queen Emma about her acquisition of Newington (below, p. 120), includes a mention that this estate had been forfeited to King Cnut by one Ælfric the *Thegn*.[595] At least three Ælfrics witnessed Cnut's diplomas, but sadly, none of them can be plausibly identified with the former holder of Newington. About half a century before, an agreement concerning an estate of Clife (Kent) was reached by Wulfric, abbot of St Augustines, Canterbury, and one Ealdred, son of Lyfing the *Thegn*.[596] We are in better luck regarding Lyfing's identification, as this name occurs in three diplomas of King Æthelred, all likely belonging to one and the same individual. Two of them concern lands of Canterbury, though one is spurious in the received form.[597] Given the geographic localisation, it is further possible that this Lyfing and the Lyfing 'of Malling' who witnessed another contemporaneous Kentish document[598] are the same person. In any case, Ealdred was a son of a royal *thegn*, and the appositional construction probably identified this quality about his father. It did not do so in S 1471 (below, p. 119): since Hæletha likely never existed, it is patently unclear if the anonymous draftsman thought of him as someone in king's service. The final, post-Conquest Latin source that would seem to use LAT. *theinus* in a similar vein is a Westminster mid-12th-century *pancarta* that enumerates purported grants to this community by King William I. Among other things, it mentions the king restore half a *hide* at Paglesham (Essex) to the abbey, at some time granted by Ealdred the *Thegn*.[599] Whether or not such person existed is lost to history, and with that the premise for his by-name.

As they stand, these pieces testify that late OE *þegn* did exhibit a faint tendency to enough self-sufficiency as to denote an occupational status. Nothing suggests, though, that this status was considered a legal property in a strict sense. However, they are perhaps indicative of the societal role people considered king's *thegns* played by the "second Viking Age". The

592 Homilien und Heiligenleben, homily 8, l. 126.

593 'I Ælfric, monk and mass-priest, although more weakly than for such orders is fitting, was sent, in king Æthelred's day, from bishop Ælfeah, Æthelwold's successor, to a minster which is called Cernel, at the prayer of Æthelmære the thane, whose birth and goodness are known everywhere' (*Ic ælfric munuc ⁊ mæssepreost swa ðeah waccre þonne swilcum hadum gebyrige. Wearð asend on æþelredes dæge cyninges fram ælfeage biscope aðelwoldes æftergengan to sumum mynstre ðe is cemel gehaten þurh æðelmæres bene ðæs þegenes. His gebyrd ⁊ goodnys sind gehwær cuðe*; *CH* I, Preface, ll. 44–49).

594 On his and his father's, the famous Ealdorman Æthelweard and author of an eponymous Latin translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, see Cubitt 2009.

595 …*Ælfric se þegen hit hæfde forworht þan cyninge to handan* ('...the thegn Ælfric had forfeited it into the king's possession'; S 1229).

596 S 1455.

597 S 905 ('1003' for 1002 AD) and the spurious S 914 (1006 for 1002 AD).

598 S 1456 (995×1005 AD; Rob 69). It is also tempting to identify with him Lyfing *minister* who witnessed S 1215 (968 AD), also in Kent, but the chronological gap of nearly three decades makes such identification sadly inconclusive.

599 Bates, *RRAN* 324 (1085×1086 AD).

role must have been important enough that addressing (albeit extremely rarely) some of such characters by their relationship to the king was considered appropriate. It is even feasible that this role commanded considerable reverence so that some of them could have adopted such identifications as endonymous. Granted, it is only an educated guess and is hardly applicable throughout. After all, if records of local agreements reflect how individuals witnessing them referred to themselves and/or how they were known in their social surrounding, the aforementioned Lyfing felt comfortable with identifications both through his royal service[600] and location of probable residence. The problemata of internalising a *thegnly* identity as a master status will be picked up below, §3.4.6.

3.3.10 Landed Proprietor

Late Old English features a crucially important sense of OE *þegn*: landed proprietor. To avoid confusion a qualification is needed that below "landed proprietor" will be understood as a person who *already* has some landed property at the moment of the corresponding account. The only exception will be allowed for early specimens of the documentary genre as they bear some very crucial importance. This meaning and its occurrence – 27 times, plus 86 vernacular endorsements to Latin diplomas – are limited to the prose format, both secular and religious, and merely four genres: documentary, secular legislation, homilies, and hagiography.

3.3.10.1 religious genres

The simplest to interpret and contextualise is the evidence about *thegns*' landed proprietorship in the Ælfrician homilies and *Vitae*. The evidence is limited to three pieces, all of which were adapted by the Abbot from previous original Latin prose. This fact facilitates our understanding.

Ælfric's land-possessing *thegns* are three semi-historical characters. One is Ananias, a dishonest early Christian who together with his wife Sapphira withheld from the congregation some of the profit from selling off their land and died on the spot for this fraud. The Vulgate (Acts 5:1) has no specific characterisation of Ananias and merely calls him "some man" (*quidam vir*). The more interesting, then, is Ælfric's selection of words when he turns him into 'a thane, called Ananias' (*sum þegen annanias gehaten*).[601] Similarly does Ælfric understand Pope Gregory's *vir fidelis* ("a man of faith") who petitions St Benedict to found a monastery (in present-day Terracina, Central Italy)[602] on his land as *sum eawfæst ðegen* ('a pious thane').[603] Finally, Ælfric translates and shortens Sulpicius Severus's *agrum Lupicini cuiusdam, honorati secundum saeculum uiri* ("field of one Lupicinus, a man honoured by laity's opinion")[604] to just *sumes þegenes land* ("a land of some *thegn*")[605] when narrating miracles of St Martin. Not much can be said about this Lupicinus, except that he was affluent enough to own a young slave (*servulus*) within his *familia*, whom the saint resurrected after a suicide. Of Lupicinus Andre Mertens notes briefly that his 'identity could not be discerned exact-

600 Especially if he witnessed S 1215 after all (above, n. 598).
601 *CH* I.22, ll. 88–95.
602 *Dialogi*, book II, chap 22:1.
603 *CH* II.11, ll. 302–312.
604 Quotation after Mertens 2017, p. 285.
605 *LS* III, *St Martin*, l. 240. Respectfully, with a look-back at the Latin original, Mary Clayton's translation of OE *þegn* as 'prefect' in this bit gives in to Andre Mertens's variant, 'nobleman', though *nota bene* the language of the anonymous homily about St Martin.

ly, since the name was frequent in the region'.[606] Curiously, the Old English anonymous homily on St Martin that makes use of the same source material, when retelling the same episode, keeps Lupicinus simply "a man" (*an mann*) but specifies his land as OE *tūn* (here: manor or vill).[607]

To generalise from these three cases, on the one hand, Ælfric's land-owning *thegns* are contextually generic landed proprietors with no further qualification. This is, on the other hand, what makes his lexical choice extremely important. Nothing in the passages just dissected necessitates it, Latin writers dryly tell of *viri* and not of high dignitaries, office-holders, or nobility. There is, contrary to the terseness of the texts, one trait that unites Ananias and the anonymous Terracinese patron: they possess their immovable property with great liberties, by medieval standards at least – they can sell or dedicate it for the construction of holy shrines. Lupicinus, too, might be characterised as an aristocrat, though the evidence remains thin. All this speaks for that, at least for some Anglo-Saxons (Ælfric and his intended audience/readers) around the year 1000 AD OE *þegn* acquired the sense of "(any) landholder with (least) circumscribed property rights". For the Middle Ages, it is appropriate to call such tenure terms effectively a privilege.

3.3.10.2 documentary genre

If we equate LAT. *minister* and OE *þegn* across the board, then king's *thegns* would without question be one of the largest continuous groups of beneficiaries in Anglo-Saxon diplomas. As far as the documentary genre is concerned, there are at least some reasons to assume so.

The first undisputedly genuine appellation of a recipient in a land transaction as LAT. *minister meus* occurred in 770 AD.[608] There then exist two unique cases when a royal donation took a guise of a document completely in Old English. The earlier one is a single-sheet Canterbury diploma[609] of the Mercian king Beorhtwulf (r. 840–852). The later one dates from King Eadred's reign[610] and will be duly addressed below in §3.4.4.2 (p. 171) in context of the importance attached to genitival markers. Beorhtwulf's grant still has one and reads, rather plainly:

> I, King Berhtwulf, give to my thegn Forthred an estate of nine hides in Wootton [Underwood, Bucks.] for him to have in perpetual inheritance, and to give after his day to whoever has earned it from him by humble obedience...[611]

There is little ground to doubt that OE *mīnum þegne* in this bit is a full equivalent to LAT. *ministro meo*. Some thirteen years later King Æthelberht, then reigning in Kent before taking the West Saxon throne, exchanged with "his loyal servant" (LAT. *minister meus fidelis*) Wul(f)laf five *sulungs* of land at *Wassingwell* (Eastwell and Westwell?) for an equal estate at Mersham (both in Kent).[612] The vernacular summary on the dorse reads that the king "gave (and booked)" (*sealde*; *sealde ⁊ gebocade*) his *thegn* (*ðegne*) Wul(f)laf the land at *Wassingwell*.

606 Mertens 2017, p. 394.
607 Mertens 2017, p. 190.
608 S 59.
609 S 204 (844×845 AD; *SEHD* 3). See comments and discussion by Gallagher 2018, pp. 227–228, 234–235.
610 S 566 (955 AD; Rob 30). The third completely vernacular diploma, S 313 (854 AD), preserved on an 11th-century single sheet, it likely a forgery.
611 *Ego Berchtwulf . cyning . sile Forðrede . minum ðegne . nigen higida lond . in Wudotune . in ece erfe him to hiobbanne ⁊ to siollanne . ðæm ðe hit wille mið eaðmodre hernisse him to ge eornigan . ofer his daeg…* (S 204).
612 S 328 (858 AD; Rob 10).

"To book" (OE [*ge*]*bōcian* or [*ge*]*bēcian*) here and elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon documents, to which genre this verb is almost exclusively confined, means "to give (a grant of land) by charter",[613] fully appropriate to the situation at hand. The year 808 AD[614] marks the start of tradition of adding vernacular endorsements to Latin royal diplomas that fully forms by the second quarter of the next century. OE *þegn* to indicate the recipient may first occur in Æthelberht's brother's reign in 868 AD:

> This is the "book" of the land at Martyr Worthy (Hants.) which [= "book"] king Æthelred gave his *thegn* Hunsige.[615]

The authenticity of this document, preserved only in the 12th-century *Codex Wintoniensis* has earlier caused disagreement, however. But the same Winchester cartulary contains the first undisputedly genuine endorsement on a royal diploma from 928 AD by King Æthelstan in favour of his *thegn* Beorhtfrith.[616] From then on, such praxis becomes widespread until the end of the period.[617]

A subtle difference between the social and linguistic needs our observation, though. While *people* called OE *þegn* are frequent recipients of land grants, the *word* itself as it is used in this particular genre does not acquire the semantics of "landed proprietor" until well the mid-11th century. This happens in the account of how Archbishop Ceolnoth of Canterbury (in office 838–870) allegedly purchased an estate from a certain *thegn* Hæletha:

> Here is declared in this document the agreement which Æthelric has made with Archbishop Eadsige about the estate at Chart [Kent] which Archbishop Ceolnoth bought from the thegn Hæletha with his own money...[618]

The charter, preserved not only in cartulary copies but a single sheet original, too, raises no objections to its authenticity. But the existence of Hæletha should be doubted. A note in later medieval manuscripts, which terms Hæletha a LAT. *princeps*, presents itself as a memorandum of the original transaction in 839 AD.[619] It is more likely to be a confection by an Anglo-Norman cartularist to support the story in S 1471, not the other way around.[620] According to PASE, no other source mentions an individual of this name. If the text is to be believed, the archbishop first purchased Chart from Hæletha 'with his [= Ceolnoth's] own money' and then obtained a diploma from King Æthelwulf. But the same text suggests that this diploma (*þa landboc*) 200 years afterwards somehow ended in possession of Æthelric and not Christ Church. For what it is worth, before us is only the evidence that in mid-11th-century Kent it was taken for granted that a *thegn* might sell (and hence own) land and, importantly, no need was felt either to specify how he had obtained it or if he enjoyed any relationships with a monarch. This usage is further consistent with Ælfric's slightly earlier rendition of a landed proprietor with freedom of disposition (Ananias) as *thegn*.

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613 DOE (*s.vv.* "bōcian, bēcan" and "ge-bōcian, ge-bēcan").
614 S 163.
615 *Þis seond ðæs landes boc þæ Æðelred cing Hunsige his ðegne saldæ æt Worðie* (S 340).
616 S 400.
617 The last time it appears is in 1061 AD (S 1034, probably authentic). A superb study of endorsement praxes is Gallagher and Wiles 2021.
618 *Her swutelað on þisum gewrite embe þa forewyrd þe Ægelric worhte wiþ Eadsige arcebisceop æt þam lande æt Cert . þe Ceolnoð arcebisceop gebohte æt Hæleþan þam þegene mid his agenan sceatte* (S 1471 [1045 AD; Rob 101]).
619 S 1625.
620 BACS XVIII, p. 678.

The only other documentary case that would meet the criteria to mean "landed proprietor" not necessitated by context stems from the same period. Sometime in 1042×1052 AD, Queen Emma produced a written statement that she had previously acquired from King Cnut the estate at Newington (Oxon.), on behalf of Christ Church in Canterbury. Before then, according to the text, this land used to belong one Ælfric the *Thegn*, but he forfeited it to the king. Worth mentioning once more is the lack of any im- or explicit connexion between this *thegnly* possessor of land and the king. This fact will be returned to below (§3.4.4.6).

3.3.10.3 legal prose

Anglo-Saxon secular legislation contains three fragments that unambiguously presuppose the prime meaning "landed proprietor" for OE *þegn*.

The first occurrence belongs to one of the four supplements to the rules of the "peace guild" passed 'by the bishops and reeves who belong to London' (*þa biscopas ⁊ þa gerefan þe to Lundenbyrig hyrað*) sometime in the 930s. The supplement took the form of a royal decree to King Æthelstan's agents of government.[621] The monarch demands compliance with his orders and threatens his negligent reeves with a loss of office (*folgoðe*), king's friendship, and a 120-shilling fine (see below), half of which sum will be paid by any of the king's "landed" (*gelandod*) *thegns* who diverts from the king's policies.[622] OE preterite participle (*ge*)*landod* (< **gelandian*) in this sense[623] is a *hapax legomenon*. Derivatives of an alternative form, *gelendan*, are better attested, if still rarely. In the 11th-century glosses to Aldhelm, LAT. *locuples* (lit. possessing large, landed property) was equated by one hand to *gelend*(*a*), by another to LAT. *dives*, and by a third to *landspedig*.[624] The anonymous author of the Wulfstanesque *Rectitudines Singularum Personarum* ("The Obligations of Individuals"; hereafter *Rectitudines*; more on it below, pp. 196–197) admitted that a beekeeper could be *wel gelend* ('well provided with land') and therefore should be given a horse for services to his lord.[625] In the hagiographic homily about Pope Gregory, Ælfric says of the pontiff that he founded seven monasteries and *gelende mid his agenum* ('endowed with his own [lands]').[626] Coupled with the documentary evidence and lexical contextualisation, especially in Ælfric's homily, the conclusion may be cautiously arrived at that King Æthelstan's legislator(s) implied that king's *thegns* might be enriched through royal grants. This would well agree with the fact that of ca. 128 *ministri* and people of similar position known in his diplomas and S 1417 (924×933 AD), perhaps, only 15 were also beneficiaries.[627] The contrast with two previous

621 Keynes 1990, p. 240; Roach 2013, p. 476.

622 …⁊ *he gefafað þa dyrnan gefingo ⁊ emban þa stéoran nelle, swa ic beboden haebbe, ⁊ on urum gewritum stent, þonne beo se gerefa buton his folgoðe ⁊ buton minum freondscipe ⁊ gesylle me CXX scll., ⁊ be healfum þara ælc minra þegna, þe gelandod sy ⁊ þa stéore swa healdan nelle, swa ic beboden habbe* ('...and if he permits secret compacts, and is unwilling to attend to the duties of government, in accordance with what I have commanded and set down in writing—the reeve shall be deprived of his office and of my friendship, and he shall pay me 120 shillings; and half this sum shall be paid by each of my thegns who is in possession of land, and is unwilling to attend to the duties of government in accordance with my commands'; VI As 11, p. 182).

623 This form can also be a homonymous preterit participle of OE (*ge*)*landian* (lit. to land, arrive).

624 Old English Glosses MS. Brussels, p. 347 (l. 3053). Ælfric used OE *landspedig* for LAT. *locuples* as well (Grammatik und Glossar, p. 53).

625 Rect 5:3, p. 448.

626 *CH* II.9, l. 35.

627 Three (Beorhthelm, Æthelstan ["Half-King"], and Sigewulf) are not identified as such in the grants (S 392, 442 [938 AD], and 437 [937 AD]) but bear this title in other diplomas. The exact number of recipients is incumbent upon the authenticity of the documents, not impeccable in case of S 392 (850 for 939 or 940 AD)

reigns is even starker: merely two of ca. 85 of King Alfred's *ministri* or similar were his grantees,[628] and only one of ca. 105 under King Edward the Elder.[629] A reservation must be made for possible losses and lacunae in our documentary coverage, of course. Furthermore, in his rescript King Æthelstan could have meant temporary fiefs held *ex officio*, too (below, p. 175).

The second time in legal prose that OE *þegn* without reservations means "landed proprietor" before anything else falls on King Edgar's Andover code, more specifically its secular part. Its date cannot be established with absolute precision and depends on the dating of the ensuing *Wihtbordesstan* edict, itself contradictory but probably later.[630] It is safest to locate the Andover code early in Edgar's reign, perhaps to 960×965 AD.

In the two relevant articles the legislator expects all tithes (*ælce teoðunga*) to be paid 'to old [i.e. parish] church[es]' (*to ðam ealdum mynstrum*) from all land that yields income:

> [...] both from the thegn's demesne land [*inland*] and the land held by his tenants [*geneatland*]—all that is under the plough.[631]

The legislator then makes an immediate reservation that any *thegn* who on his bookland has a church with a graveyard will pay a third of his own tithes to that church of his (*into his cyrican*). But should it miss a graveyard, the man is to pay only so much as he wishes on top of the tithe to his "old minster".[632] Some sixty years later, a verbatim repetition of these stipulations surfaces in King Cnut's laws,[633] whose legal mastermind Wulfstan was not at all shy to later recycle the Andover legislation 'virtually in full'.[634] His repetition, therefore, adds little by itself besides hinting at that he must have held them in esteem and still applicable despite the lapse of time. His familiarity with these Andover clauses and their language also may suggest wherefrom a church as an element in his exemplary description in *Geþyncðu* of a *thegnly* residential compound might have come.

The significance of this testimony is hard to overestimate. We shall prudently reserve the discussion of bookland as a legal phenomenon and types of Anglo-Saxon land tenure for a separate, non-obligatory section (see Vignette 3). Important for the moment are the lexical and semantical implications of the language used by King Edgar's legal staff.

The syntax in clause 2 is peculiar. The combination of OE *hwā* + a gen. plur. noun seems unique for the whole Anglo-Saxon legal corpus and is literally translated "any-/someone from among [the?] *thegns*". Apparently, King Edgar's legal advisors saw *thegns* as a distinctive social category. At least syntactically then, in the eyes of the Andover legislators, possession

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and 440 (938 AD). The exact number of witnesses further hinges on the accuracy of prosopographical identifications and separations of namesakes.

628 S 345 (882 AD) and S 356 (871×899 AD). S 351 is very likely a forgery.

629 S 364 (901 AD).

630 Wormald 1999, pp. 441–442.

631 *…ægðer ge of þegnes inlande ge of geneatlande, swa swa his sulh gega* (II Eg 1:1, p. 196). A condensed essence of this requirement appears in one of Archbishop Wulfstan's law-code, known however only from a Latin translation: *…et omnis tainus* [*det*] *decimet totum quicquid habet* ('...and every thegn shall render a tithe of all that he has'; VII Atr 1:3, p. 260).

632 [§2.] *Gyf hwa þonne ðegna sy, ðe on his boclande cyrican habbe, þe legerstow on sy, gesylle he þane þriddan dæl his agenre teðounge into his cyrican.* [§2:1.] *Gyf hwa cyrican habbe, þe legerstow on ne sie, þonne do he of þam nigan dælum his preoste þæt þæt he wille* (II Eg 2–2:1, p. 196). More discussion of this stipulation, its Anglo-Saxon context, and potential Carolingian precedent is discussed by Blair 2006, pp. 442–444. Blair also discusses (at pp. 385–396) the actual landscape of private churches that King Edgar seems to have been regulating.

633 Wormald 1999, p. 345 (n. 382).

634 Wormald 1999, p. 361.

of bookland was the socially relevant feature definitive of belonging to this category. If "fully own land" in *Geþyncðu*'s stereotyping of a *thegn* indeed means bookland, then Wulfstan shared such definitiveness forty years later. It seems to have been conceived of as of something so self-evident as to require no elaboration, because contextual emphasis rests not on bookland but rather on a private church.

A later clause in the Andover code helps to better define this social category. The law would have nine tenths of a tithe non-payer's property confiscated: one as the tithe; four will pass into the hand of the landlord (*se landhlaford*); and the remaining four into the bishop's, regardless of whether the offender is a king's or *thegn*'s (commended?) man.[635] An earlier and already introduced London "peace guild" decreed that property of a condemned thief is to be split into three: after subtracting the value of the stolen goods, one part will belong to his widow, provided she is innocent; one to the king; and one to a "fellowship" (*geferscipe*) – *pace* Frederick Attenborough, Tom Lambert sees in them the party that pursued the offender.[636] But 'if it happens to be bookland or bishops' lands', then the *landhlāford* is entitled to a half of the fellowship's third.[637] Lambert diverts once again from Attenborough and Felix Liebermann and interprets this refinement in a territorial rather than tenurial sense. To all appearances, here landlord and bookland-holder are one and the same person. By extension, it could be surmised that in King Edgar's legislation OE (*land*)*hlāford* and *þegn* and could be mutually exchangeable when it came to landed proprietorship. Based on this, it would not stretch the lexical evidence throughout the Andover pronouncements to equate *se landhlaford* who gets four tenths of a tithe non-payer's possessions with the *þegn* whose man might be such deviationist, with the *þegn* whose demesne is liable to tithing, and with *hwā þegna* who has a bookland made up of inland and *geneātland*. In §3.3.13, one post-Conquest royal writ and Latin translations of King Æthelstan and Edmund's legal correspondence will be shown to point into the same direction (below, pp. 134–135).

The last relevant juridical fragment is a late (? 990×1030 AD) quasi-legal tract *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge* ("Concerning the betrothal of a woman"). This freestanding text reveals a visible link to Wulfstan's intellectual milieu in clause 1. *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge* features OE *sammæle* (lit. agreed, accordant < ON *sammæli*/*sammáli*/*sammála*, "agreement", "agreeing"),[638] which already by *c.* 990×1005 AD, when it appears in a Kentish land bargain,[639] seems to have been naturalised anyway. But beside these two, *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge* exhibits no obvious traces of a Scandinavian context. Little can be said further about either the geographical sphere of application, or the author and their intents except that (s)he was 'filling in some of the gaps left by royal legislation',[640] perhaps.

Clause 6 has the woman's relatives (*magas*) prepare the future wedding, once the parties have reached an understanding on all arrangements. Clause 7 then explicates that,

> [i]f, however, one wishes to take her away from that district [lit. land] into that of another

635 II Eg 3:1, pp. 196–198. *Cf.* I As 3, p. 146.
636 Lambert 2017, p. 332.
637 VI As 1:1, p. 173. A somewhat similar rule that entitled a landlord to a half of an apprehended thief's property are contemporaneous III Eg 7:1, p. 204, and Hu 2:1, p. 192.
638 Pons-Sanz 2013, p. 48.
639 S 1455 (Rob 62).
640 Roach 2013, p. 476. Roach applies this idea to other standalone juridical pieces, such as *Swerian* and *Becwæð*; the idea that the same motive produced the betrothal manual has been expressed by Cardwell 2022, p. 85. His opportune study of this otherwise neglected source provides the basis for the assessment of this source here and below.

> thegn [lit. into the land of another *thegn*], then it is to her interest that her friends [perhaps, kindred too][641] have the assurance that no wrong will be done to her, and that if she commits an offence, they may be allowed to stand next in paying compensation, if she possesses nothing with which she can pay.[642]

The envisaged situation is rather transparent: a woman must be safeguarded in the face of the law, if her husband, his kinsfolk, or fellow residents can/will not protect her. As summarised by Samuel Cardwell,

> [w]e might infer [...] that it was considered normal enough for women to marry outside their immediate communities...[643]

Therefore, OE *þegn* in this passage denotes a landed proprietor on whose territory other people might live in family groups. Because he seems to not be involved in the betrothal procedure in any wise, apparently, he commands no personal lordship over the bride-to-be and thus their only bond is territorial. The fact that leaving his estate normally severs familial ties suggests that he owns relatively large tracts of land, at the very minimum more than just one vill, perhaps. The most economical understanding of OE *þegn* in *Be Wifmannes Beweddunge* is thus as a landlord of a medium standing.

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In summation, all four studied genres collectively reveal one and the same pattern. At the earliest stage, as far as extant documentary fragments show, OE *þegn* is used to denote a recipient in a land transaction but not to convey the sense "landed proprietor" on its own. This shift occurs later and manifests itself only by the 960s in the Andover law-code at the earliest. §§3.4.4.5–6 below will argue that the necessary preconditions for it ought to have been the expansion of the Cerdicings' claim on landlords' properties, the territorialisation of royal lordship, so to speak. The dissemination of the attendant lexical package that used OE *þegn* as a natural monarchocentric lexical choice to convey such claims, will be connected to the spreading use of "king's *thegns* there-and-there" element in the stock greeting formula, even if delivered orally. The foregoing section nuances this supposition. The parallel and no less effective mechanism behind this development appears to also have been the royal land patronage to kings' liegemen, expressly styled *thegns*. It particularly rapidly took off under King Æthelstan, probably referred to by the English historian William of Malmesbury (*c.* 1095 – *c.* 1143),[644] and was likely emulated by some high-ranking prelates (below, pp. 191–195).

3.3.11 High Social Rank

Notions of social stratification were hardly alien to the Anglo-Saxons. OE *þegn* figures in two prominent lexical means Old English writers commonly found to express such ideas. This has left only 12 important testimonies in the corpus. All are prose and secular and

641 DOE (*s.v.* "frēond *3*").

642 *Gif hy man ðonne ut of lande lædan wille on oðres þegnes land, ðonne bið hire ræd, ðæt frynd ða forword habban, ðæt hire man nan woh to ne do, ⁊ gif heo gylt gewyrce, ðæt hy moton beon bote nyhst, gif heo næfð, of hwam heo bete* (Wif 7, p. 442).

643 Cardwell 2020, p. 95.

644 *Hoc enim uir ille animo imperauerat suo, ut nichil opum ad crumenas corraderet, sed omnia conquisita uel monasteriis uel fidelibus suis munificus expenderet. In hoc thesauros paternos, in hoc uictoriarum suarum titulos tota uita euacuabat* ('He had made it a principle to accumulate no wealth for his own pocket, but to spend all that he got generously on monasteries or on his loyal followers: these were the objects on which he used throughout his life to lavish his inherited treasure and the proceeds of his victories'; *GRA*, book II, chap 134:4, pp. 214–215).

belong to the documentary genre (charters), legal literature (Anglo-Welsh treaty and Wulfstan's "Mercian Laws"), and Byrhtferth's scholarly-pedagogic *Enchiridion*. It should be noted upfront that both lexical means share an arresting feature, namely that OE *þegn* gets adopted at roughly the same time.

3.3.11.1 "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formulae

Certain post-Roman societies seem to have been conceived by their intellectual elites as composed of two comprehensive strata that seem to best approximate our definition of a status group in the methodological apparatus advanced above. For simplicity's sake the upper stratum will pass under "elite" and the lower, conversely, under "rank-and-file". On a purely notional level, these two were thought of as mutually exclusive but also complementary inasmuch as they, to borrow a phrase from Ann Williams, 'could be used to embrace everybody, or at least everybody who mattered'.[645]

Whether this dichotomy was indigenous or inherited/built on the earlier social precedent is largely immaterial for our purposes.[646] What is important though, is that from the moment we have our first written sources, Old English intellectuals closely followed suit (Table 1) and to this end used what Paul Acker termed antonymous (contrastive) syndetic formulae.[647] In their language, the lexemes to describe the elite revolved around the notion of nobility. In legal prose, it was without doubt the nobility in Reuter's definition, namely people of a juridically defined privileged social status. Within the Anglo-Saxon legal toolkit, regulating it was commonly done via assigning people various *wergilds*, hence the common lexical expression for Anglo-Saxon legal nobility, OE *twelfhynde* (*mann*), as opposed to legal commoners, OE *twihynde* (*mann*). King Edmund's laws on bloodfeud and the associated *Wergeld* both suggest that these legal ranks were heritable.[648] Outside of laws, writers found various other verbal means for this dyad. It is debatable if their OE *gesīþcund*, *æþelingas*, *æþelboren* and LAT. *nobiles*, *comites*, *optimates* always presupposed the same legal distinction. Most likely it went tacitly implicit, but how much it was a universal is harder to elucidate. Consider for example numerous instalments of the OE rhyming jingle (*ge*) *ceorlas* (*ge*) *eorlas* (lit. both commoners and earls), common to legal and non-legal genres. Henry Chadwick convincingly elucidated that in West Saxon legal register, OE *ceorl* and *twihynde* (*mann*) were fully synonymous.[649] OE *eorl*(*cund*), on the other hand, as a regular social term is restricted to only four early fragments,[650] of which only the Kentish laws of Kings Hlothere and Eadric (*c.* 679×686 AD) mention his *wergild* of 300 (Kentish) shillings as opposed to a 100-shilling *wergild* of a *ceorl*. The lexical syndetic dyad "commoners and earls" would not appear for 200 years to come.[651] We are therefore left to ponder whether in West Saxon legal language the archaic OE *eorl* was a true technical term or caught on

645 Williams 2008, p. 2.

646 Suffice it to mention that Tveit 2016, p. 223, does not exclude that such a division of the Visigothic society articulated in the 7th-century legislation could theoretically have been inspired by the Roman edict of Emperor Caracalla (212 AD). Her conclusions are derived from the lexical analysis of the sources in question, and the author herself is reserved on this notion.

647 Acker 1998, p. 4.

648 II Em 1, p. 186; and Wer 2 (translated and discussed by Wormald 1999, pp. 374–378).

649 Their verbal interchangeability is apparent in the hierarchy of penalties for crimes and offences (Af 29–31, p. 64, *vs* Af 10, 18:1–3, 39–39:2, 40, pp. 56, 58–60, 72; Ine 51, p. 112, *vs* Ine 70, p. 118; Chadwick 1905, pp. 87–99).

650 Abt 13–14, 75, pp. 4, 7; and Hl 1, p. 9.

651 Af 4:2, p. 50.

simply on the merit of its rhyming complementarity to OE *ceorl*. Similarly complicated is the extent to which OE *ceorl* carried a technical meaning outside legal texts. The opposition "two- and twelve-hundreders" did not have to be exclusively legal either, as it, too, occurred outside laws. Since some lexemes in these formulae take the OE suffixes *-cund*[652] and *-boren*, they presuppose heredity, so in Reuter's terms, describe an aristocracy. In sum, we are probably justified to treat such formulae as describing status groups rather than narrow and concrete legal ranks, all the more so in non-legal contexts. Such consistent delimitation, however, was probably not as obvious or relevant to contemporaries: in practice there must have been at least some overlap between Anglo-Saxon aristocracy and nobility in Reuter's definition (*cf.* King Edmund's "second" code and *Wergeld*) – an imbrication best visualised in the Venn diagram on the conceptual map at Figure 1. In this respect John Hudson and Thomas Charles-Edwards's opinions on the practical overlaps between preconditions and consequences of social status, not always reflected upon by contemporaries, hold particularly true.[653]

OE *þegn* assumes the position of elite in pairs such as these no earlier than the 990s. This happens in a non-royal Anglo-Welsh treaty, sometimes known in literature as the *Ordinance Concerning the* Dunsæte (lit. hill-dwellers). The text halves the *wergilds* to be paid for a Welshman killed by an Englishman and vice versa, "whether he be *thegn*-born, whether he be *ceorl*-born".[654] Of paramount importance is to note that already at its first attestation, OE *þegn* in this formula lexically suggests hereditary status and hence, an aristocratic aspect. Where exactly the area of the *Dunsæte* lay cannot be known with certainty, although there have been brought forward circumstantial reasons to associate it with Archenfield in Herefordshire. The date of the treaty, beside the *terminus ante quem* of the manuscripts (the 12th century) is a hard nut to crack. George Molyneaux has recently amassed a body of indirect but cumulative evidence to put it

> [...] substantially later than Æthelstan's reign [...] no earlier than the reign of Edgar, probable that it is from Æthelred's reign or after.[655]

This dating agrees well with the only other three appearances OE *þegn* in "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formulae: OE *ceorl*(*as*) [and] *þegn*(*as*) in Wulfstan's *Mircna Laga*[656] and Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*[657] and OE *on ðegenan ⁊ on ceorlan* in a Kentish marriage agreement[658] – all neatly packed between *c.* 1010 and 1023 AD. Instructive is the phrasing of a stray legal piece dubbed *Wergeld* by Felix Liebermann and persuasively characterised by Patrick Wormald as 'an unofficial treatise inspired by royal legislation' of King Edmund. It outlines the protocol for *wergild* payment, and the unknown author in the 940s still pairs *ceorlas* with the *twelfhunde*, not with *thegns*.[659]

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652 On the semantics and function of this suffix, see Hofstetter 1992; Ciszek-Kiliszewska 2015.

653 Hudson 2012, p. 200; Edwards 1986, p. 56.

654 *…sy he ðegenboren, sy he ceorlboren* (Duns 5, p. 376).

655 Molyneaux 2011, p. 267. In my treatment of this source, I fully rely on Molyneaux's extensive analysis. The *Ordinance* has since then been scrutinised in articles published in a special volume by Guy, Williams, and Delaney 2022.

656 Mirce 1–1:1, p. 462.

657 *Enchiridion*, pt III, chap 2, p. 140 (l. 56).

658 S 1461 (1016×1020 AD; Rob 77).

659 *Eal man sceal æt cyrliscum were be þæere mæðe don ðe him to gebyreð swa we be twelfhyndum tealdan* ('With a ceorl's wergild, everyone shall proceed along the lines proper for him, as we reckoned for twelve-hundredmen'; Wer 7; text and translation by Wormald 1999, pp. 375, 377).

Formulae (nominative forms indicated)	**Date** (AD) 694	730s	838–880s	890s	910s	930s	940s	959	968	990s	1000×1027
swa gesiðcund […] *swa cierlisc*[660]	×										
priuati et optimates; *plebs siue optimates*; *tam nobiles quam priuati*[661]		×××									
nobiles ac plebes perplurimum; *nobiles simul et mediocres*; *majores una cum mediocribus*; *nobiles et infimi*; *uulgi* [*et*] *nobiles*; [*tam*] *nobiles* [*simul atque*]/ [*scilicet et/quam*] *ignobiles*[662]		×××××××	××	×	×				×	×	×
major minorisque persona[663]			×								
ge æðelinga ge oðerra; [*ge*] *æðele* [*ge*] *unæðele* (×2)[664]				×××							
ge [*wiðer*] *ceorl*[*e*], *ge eorl*[*e*]; *ge ceorlisc, ge eorlisc*; *ceorlas and eorlas; ceorl wyrð to earle*; *eode* […] *eorl to þam ceorle*[665]				×		×					×××××
comites et/vel vilani[666]						×××	×				
xiihynde oðde twyhunde; *twelfhynd*[*e*] [*and*] *twyhynd*[*e*] [*menn*]; *ge twelfhynde men ge twyhynde*; *twelfhende vel twihende*; *twelfhynde*[*i*] ⁊ *twihynde*[667]						×	××		×	×	×
ðegenboren […] *ceorlboren*[668]										×	
ceorl[*as*] [*and*] *þegn*[*as*] (×2); *on ðegenan* ⁊ *on ceorlan*[669]											×××
twelfhynde menn [and] *ceorlas*[670]											×
ða æþelboren […] *þa læsboren*[671]											×
tam nobiles quam plebeji[672]											×
betera [and] *wiersa*[673]											×

Table 1. Sample of binary formulaic oppositions "elite *vs* rank-and-file" in Anglo-Saxon texts (Anglo-Norman Latin translations of extant OE originals excluded). Crosses indicate the number of occurrences; a paler shade of grey indicates discontinuous periods between attested occurrences. This list is likely incomplete but testifies to the proliferation of such oppositions

660 Ine 54, pp. 112–114.

661 *HE*, book I, chap 22, p. 66; book III, chap 30, p. 322; book V, chap 23, p. 560.

662 *HE*, book II, chap 14, p. 190; book III, chaps 14, 21, 25 (recycled in JW: *s.a.* 664 AD), 27, pp. 256, 280, 306, 308, 312; book V, chap 7, p. 472; *VÆR*, chap 76, p. 60; *Vita Sancti Edmundi*, chap 13, p. 82 (published by Winterbottom 1972; written shortly before 990 AD but narrates about the 860s); *Vita Sancti Ecgwini*, book III, chap 4, p. 260 (published by Lapidge 2009; written shortly before 1016 AD but narrates about the turn of the 7th century); S 207 (855 AD), 217 (880 for 887 AD), 373 (904 AD), 806 (? 968 AD, problematic authenticity).

663 S 1438 (838 AD).

664 *OEHE*, book III, chap 15, 19, pp. 222, 240; book V, chaps 8, 23, pp. 406, 480.

665 Af 4:2, p. 50; VI As Prologue, p. 173; *OEMC*, p. 74 (l. 31); S 136 (purportedly 793 AD but in effect a much later fabrication); Geþyncðo 1, p. 456; Grið 21:2, p. 472; *Institutes of Polity*, p. 254; *Battle of Maldon*, l. 132.

666 III As Prologue, p. 170; IV As 3, 6, pp. 171–172; III Em 7:2, p. 191 (all extant in *Quadripartitus* only, dated to 1113×1118 AD by Felix Liebermann and before 1108 AD by Sharpe 2010).

667 VI As 8:2, p. 178; Wer 1–1:1; III Em 2, p. 190; S 806; *Historia Ramesiensis* pt II, chap 25, p. 50 (published in Macray 1886; thought to have recycled earlier material); S 985 (1017×1020 AD; *Writs* 26); Cn 1020:1, p. 273

668 Duns 5, p. 376.

669 Mirce 1–1:1, p. 462; *Enchiridion*, pt III, chap 2, p. 140 (l. 56); S 1461.

670 Að 1, p. 464. The evidence of the *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge* was excluded because the text distinguishes an additional category besides the *twelfhynde* and *ceorlas*.

671 *Institutes of Polit*y, p. 257.

672 Cn 1027:Prologue, p. 276 (extant in *Quadripartitus* only).

673 Cn 1020:10, p. 274.

3.3.11.2 "good/elder people" collocations

Another prevalent way to refer to the Anglo-Saxon elite involved two-word collocations with the first element "good/best" or "eldest" and the second represented by one of the possible hyponyms for OE *mann*. This lexical device neatly conforms to Patricia Crone's postulation cited in the Introduction (above, p. 29), namely that comparative forms are a common expression of social hierarchies and individual strata's positions therein. Synonymous was the monolexical and polysemic OE *duguþ* (> MODE *doughty*, finds cognates in other contemporary Germanic languages: GER. *tüchtig*, DAN. *dygtig*, SW. *duktig*, etc.) which in a collective nominal sense ranged in meanings from the Roman Senate to "tried champions" as opposed to "young warriors".[674] As with the binary "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formulae, the concept of "good people" as elite was not unique to Anglo-Saxon England. Neither was its lexical realisation. Early medieval continental sources evidence to the proliferation of similar ideas that found similar lexical solutions in form of LAT. *boni homines/viri* (lit. good men), *optimi pagenses* (lit. the best countryfolk), etc.,[675] and, of course, since Roman times the term "elder people" (LAT. *senator*, *senior*, etc.) often represented for power-holders.

Collocations on this model are attested in Old English texts starting from the Alfredian prose. Under the year 872 AD (*recte* 871), the Abingdon manuscripts (B, C) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tersely report among the casualties of the Battle at *Meretun* Bishop Heahmund (of Sherborne; in office 867/868–871) and many "good men".[676] From the start, to all appearances, "good" and "eldest" in this collocation used to be synonyms, because "eldest men" twice appear among victims of consul Quintus Fulvius's campaign in Campania in the Old English adaptation of Orosius.[677] "Best" men seem to join them latest, first in the Canterbury bilingual version (F) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as an alteration of the "eldest people" in the Peterborough manuscript.[678]

OE *þegn* joins this vocabulary of "good people" conspicuously at about the same time as it enters "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formulae. As a matter of fact, it might have occurred even slightly earlier, when it had already assumed the sense "landed proprietor". According to a record of a land purchase of Kingston Bagpuize (Berks.), the transaction was witnessed by lords (OE *hlāfording*, rendered LAT. *seniores* in a later translation) gathered in Alderbury (Berks.), among them 'very many other thegns' (*swiðæ manega oðra ðegenas*).[679] Omission of "good" or similar adjectives could be coincidental or caused by the novelty of the introduction and in any case not detrimental to the argument. Also worth noting is OE *þegn*'s disappearance from this list in the wake of the Norman Conquest (Table 2). A complication

674 DOE (*s.v.* "duguþ").

675 Davies and Fouracre 1986, pp. 286–287; Bougard, Bührer-Thierry, and Le Jan 2013, p. 749. The same semantical potential realised itself in, for instance, Old Russian sources. In reference to elites they, too, often use lexemes derived of adjectives with the basic meaning "old/elder/eldest", "prominent", "best" (ORUS. *stareĭi*, *naročityj*, *vyasčij*, *lučii*, etc.), including their opposition to all sorts of "lower people". The topic, however, is riddled with various historical problems and interpretations, which are beyond the point of this study. A cursory reading can include Vilkul 2004; Stefanovich 2012, pp. 213–218, 488–491 *et passim*, with references to works by, e.g., Valentin Yanin and Anton Gorskiy to name but a few. On the high medieval Norwegian analogy, see Helle 1972.

676 …⁊ *þær wearð Heahmund bisceop ofslegen* ⁊ *fela godra manna* (*ASC*: 872 AD [MSS B, C]). Note that "good men" also appear in the corpus in a straightforward meaning, literal meaning (often implying religious righteousness).

677 *OEOr*, book IV, chap 10, p. 276.

678 *ASC*: 1036 AD (MSS E, F).

679 S 1216 (971×980 AD; Rob 51).

to this otherwise well-aligned chronology comes from two occurrences of "eldest *thegns*" (*yldestan ðegnas* and *yldestan ealdor-þegnum*) in *Judith* (ll. 10 and 242), a poem which cannot be dated any more precisely than broadly the 10th century, perhaps even its later parts, if the *terminus ante quem* be drawn at the date of the manuscript (BL, MS Cotton Vitellius A xv). In *Judith*, however, the "eldest *thegns*" are more likely to be high-ranking commanders in Holofernes's army (*cf.* above, p. 100), to judge from the context and collation with the Latin text of the Old Testament, generously embellished and enlarged by an Anglo-Saxon poet.

There can be little doubt that, on the whole, collocations such as these enjoyed a great level of interchangeability. For example, "good" and "best" men can be a circle of people around a powerful person.[680] There are also two late hints that "goodness" could be perceived as heritable[681] and thus people of this status fall in the category of aristocracy.

Simultaneously, as formulated by Bougard and colleagues (above, p. 25), "good people" do not appear monolith all the way. Some gradation can be perceived in lexical choices of corresponding adjectives and frequently attracted descriptive quantifiers. "Good" people nearly always came with "many (other)" (OE *manige/fela ōþre*), sometimes with a further intensifier OE *swīþe* (lit. very).[682] Charters sometimes further indicate that "good" people can be too numerous of an assemblage to be listed in full: a Winchester document says that the decision was passed by

> [...] in addition many good men, both ecclesiastics and laymen, whose names cannot all be recorded here,[683]

– and three other texts contain statements to a like effect.[684] Lexical hints such as these compel the conclusion that "good" promoted greater inclusivity and thus this group was probably all round larger. We would probably be correct to put the minimum of the impressionistic and formulaic "many" in such scores in the region of a few dozens. Reporting Earl Harold's vindictive strike in the mouth of the Severn following Earl Godwine's expulsion, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* enumerates among the casualties of the misfortunate resistance troop 'more than thirty good thegns, apart from other people'.[685] This later addition of "other people" is interesting since "countless people" (OE *ungerīm folc*) recur at the end of lists of military casualties of a viking attack on East Anglia in 1010 AD and the Battle of Hastings in 1066 AD, in the former case after 'many other good thegns' (*feala oþera godra þegna*).[686] Phrasings such as this presuppose exactly what we find among other elites throughout history, namely that in accordance with Mosca's thesis, "good *thegns*" are a stratum wider than the top decision-making social group and are a mediator between it and the general

680 King (S 985 and S 1426 [1061×1065 AD; Rob 117]), *ASC*: 1119 AD [MS E]); earl (S 1478 [1053×1055 AD; Rob 115]); Earl Harold's mother (*ASC*: 1067 AD [MS D]); Earl Harold's sons (*ASC*: 1069 AD [MS D]); Mormaer of Moray (*ASC*: 1078 AD [MS D]).

681 Of the abbot of Peterborough, Brand (in office 1066–1069), the chronicler says that the prelate 'was of good family' (*se abbot wæs goddera manne*; *ASC*: 1067 AD [MS D]). Describing the garrison of Rochester, his colleague mentions among it 'all the highest-born men in this country or in Normandy' (*ealle þa betstboren men þe wæron innan þisan lande oððe on Normandige*; *ASC*: 1087 AD [*recte* 1088; MS E]). OE *betstsboren* is extremely rare and attested only six times: DOE (*s.v.* "betst-boren").

682 S 1216; *ASC*: 1039 AD (MS C), 1087 AD (MS E).

683 *…ꝛ þærtoeacan mani god mann ægðær ge hadode ge lewede þe heora naman ne magon beon hær on ealle ameareode* (S 1391 [1043×1044 AD; Rob 98]).

684 S 1473 (1044×1048 AD; Rob 103), 1400 (1038×1050 AD; Rob 108), 1426.

685 *…ma þonne .xxx. godera þegena butan oðrum folce* (*ASC*: 1052 AD [MSS C, D]). Quotation after MS C.

686 *ASC*: 1010 (MS C, D, F) and 1066 AD (MS C). Quotation after MS C.

Collocation (nominative forms indicated)	**Date** (AD) 872×899	914×930	990×1015	1010×1038	1036×1050	1050×1055	1056×1069	1078×1109	1119×1154
gōde menn[687]	×			××××	×××××	××	×××××		×××
ieldestan menn[688]	×	××	×××		×			××	
gōde cnihtas[689]				××				×	
gōde þegnas[690]			××	×		×			
ieldestan þegnas[691]			×××			×			
betstan menn[692]					××	×	××	×	×
dohtig menn[693]				×					
betstboren menn[694]								×	

Table 2. Sample of datable lexical realisations of the idea of an elite in Old English collocations on the "better/best/eldest + persons" model. Crosses indicate the number of occurrences; a paler shade of grey indicates discontinuous periods between attested occurrences. Repetitions in various manuscripts of *ASC* have been excluded. Occurrences within the same text in the same fragment have been ignored in the chart but indicated in the footnotes. This list is likely incomplete but testifies to the proliferation of such collocations

populace in the overall social stratification (above, p. 25). "Eldest" people, on the other hand, figure more often with the qualification "(all) the" (OE [*ealle*] *þā*) (six pairings out of ten occurrences).[695] The same is true for the "best" people (seven pairings out of nine attestations).[696] Another discrepancy reveals itself in the scope of the areas to accommodate such characters. "Best" can be equally applied to both regional (of Sandwich and Isle of Wight[697] or London)[698] and supraregional elites (of Wessex[699] or the whole country).[700] With

687 *ASC*: 872 AD (MSS B, C); S 1220 (1013×1018×1020 AD; Rob 75); S 1459 (1014×1023 [? 1017] AD); S 985; S 1462; S 1466 (1038×1050 AD; Rob 90); *ASC*: 1039 AD (MS C); S 1391; S 1473; S 1400; *ASC*: 1050 AD (MS D); S 1478; *ASC*: 1056 AD (MSS C, D); S 1064 (1058×1066 AD; *Writs* 2); S 1426; *ASC*: 1066 AD (MS C, D); 1067 AD (MS D); 1128 AD (MS E); 1137 AD (MS E); 1154 AD (MS E).

688 *OEOr*, book IV, chap 10, p. 276 (×2); *ASC*: 914 (MS A)/915 AD (MSS B, C); Blas 3, p. 388; II As 20 (×2), p. 160; S 1497 (956×1002 AD); *Heptateuch*, pp. 128, 182, 357; *Seven Sleepers* (×3); *ASC*: 1036 AD (MSS E, F); exchange in Canterbury (below, n. 695); *ASC*: 1087 AD (MS E).

689 S 1460 (1010×1023 AD; Rob 83); S 1464 (1020×1038 AD; Rob 80); *ASC*: 1087 AD (MS E).

690 S 1454 (990×992 AD; Rob 66); III Atr 4, p. 228; *ASC*: 1010 AD (MSS C, D, F); 1052 AD (MSS C, D).

691 III Atr 3:1, p. 228; S 1422; S 1409; *ASC*: 1015 AD (MSS C, D, E, F).

692 *ASC*: 1036 AD (MSS E, F); 1048 AD (MS C); 1051 (MS F)/1052 AD (MS E); 1066 AD (MS D); 1067 AD (MS D); 1069 AD (MS D); 1078 AD (MS D); 1119 AD (MS E).

693 S 1461.

694 *ASC*: 1087 AD (MS E).

695 S 1497, 1422 (1007×1014 AD; Rob 74), 1409; record of exchange between a merchant gild and Christ Church, Canterbury, 1093×1109 AD (Urry 1967, II, p. 385); *ASC*: 914 (MS A)/915 AD (MSS B, C, D), 1036 AD (MS E).

696 *ASC*: 1036 AD (MS F), 1048 AD (MS C), 1066 AD, 1069 AD, 1078 AD (MS D), 1052 AD, 1119 AD (MS E). To this list, most likely, belongs *ASC* 1087 AD (MS E), which tells of "best-born" people (OE *betstboren menn*). "All (the) good" people are marginally rare and occur in only S 1462 and *ASC s.a.* 1128 and 1154 AD (MS E).

697 *ASC*: 1048 AD (MS C).

698 *ASC*: 1066 AD (MS D).

699 *ASC*: 1036 AD (MS F).

700 *ASC*: 1051 AD (MS F)/1052 and 1087 AD (MS E).

but two (supra)regional[701] exceptions, the "eldest" people are found on provincial (shire),[702] urban,[703] and district (hundredal)[704] levels only. "Good" people are always confined only to the local level of a town or shire, save one exception in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* when it lists the English hostages King William I brought with him in after the Battle of Hastings:

> [...] Archbishop Stigand, and Æthelnoth, abbot of Glastonbury, and Edgar Cild and Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar, and Earl Waltheof, and many other good men from England.[705]

Occasional deviations from these patterns suggest that the Anglo-Saxon elite was thought of by Old English writers as more of a spectrum rather than as of composed of strictly discrete and delimited divisions. Nevertheless, the patterns are still regular enough to take a calculated risk and line up a possible notional pecking order within this elite, albeit with some inevitable overlaps:

- below the elite: "common" people" (OE *folc*):[706] can be "other" or "countless"; level: local;
- "good people": almost regularly "(very) many (other)", at times too many to list down; level: almost exclusively town or shire; inclusivity: wide;
- "eldest people": frequently "all (the)"; level: between hundredal and national, mostly provincial; inclusivity: moderate (?);
- "best people": almost always "all (the)"; level: both provincial and national; inclusivity: restricted.

Based on this lexical-conceptual hierarchy, when acting on behalf of their communities (see further below, §3.4.5.2) as a collective actor, some late *thegns* clearly were conceptualised as a local elite of a local standing.

3.3.12 (*Generic*) *Man/Person*

A recorded sense of OE *þegn* that should attract attention in comparison with those in the Old Norse corpus (below, §4.3.1.1) is when this lexeme signifies nothing more specific than simply a (male) person. Construing such genericness follows when a person called a *thegn* does not exhibit any other previously established socially relevant features (e.g., personal service, landed proprietorship, or military engagement) that would warrant such an appellation. On a lexical level, this genericness is sometimes reinforced by pairing OE *þegn* with OE *ænig* or (*ge*)*hwilc* (lit. any, anyone; two and seven pairings respectively). Overall, this meaning is restricted almost exclusively to poetic textual format with a slight

701 *ASC*: 1015 AD (MSS C, D, E, F): murder of Sigefrith and Morcær, two (of the?) "eldest *thegns*" of "Seven (= Five) Boroughs" at the hands of Eadric *Streona*; 1036 AD (MS F): Earl Godwine and the "eldest" people of Wessex opposed Harold Harefoot's election. For the latter case, however, note that MS F reads "all the best men". Ælfric's use of OE *ieldestan menn* could theoretically be in the same vein when he wrote of *senes Israel* (Josh. 7:6), although this could have been inspired by his similar rendition of *principes synanogae* (Exod. 34:31), and these cases are farther removed from the rest.

702 *OEOr*, book IV, chap 10, p. 276 (of Campania); S 1422 (of Dorset); S 1409 (of Worcestershire).

703 *OEOr*, book IV, chap 10, p. 276 (of Capua); S 1497 (of Bedford and Hertford); Canterbury exchange (of Canterbury merchant guild; above, n. 695); *ASC*: 914 (MS A)/915 AD (MSS B, C, D) (of Bedford and Northampton), 1087 AD (MS E) (of Hereford); II As 20:1, 20:4, p. 160; Blas 3, p. 388; *Heptateuch*, p. 357 (Deut. 25:7) (of a generic town); *Seven Sleepers* 109 (p. 644), 114 (p. 646), and 119 (p. 648) (of Ephesus).

704 III Atr 3:1, p. 228 (of a wapentake).

705 *…Stigand arcebiscop, ⁊ Ægelnað abbod on Glæstingabiri, ⁊ Eadgar cild, ⁊ Eadwine eorl, ⁊ Morkere eorl ⁊ Wælþeof eorl, ⁊ manege oðre gode men of Englalande* (*ASC*: 1066 AD [MS D]).

706 *Cf.* below, n. 1234, and use of OE *folclīc* as an opposition to OE *æðele*.

preponderance of the religious type over secular (10 specimens versus 8 respectively), with 14 occurrences[707] over 12 respectively.[708] When exactly this semantic potential was first realised is hard to tell, not least because no sharp distinction between "man" and "warrior [who is often a servant of a ruler]" is truly meaningful in heroic poetry. At the latest, to judge from *Andreas* and metric epilogue to *Cura Pastoralis*, OE *þegn* started to be used in this sense at the end of the 9th century.

When conveying it, OE *þegn* could be applied to various people, sometimes in an abstract way, without any apparent discretion. The *Rune Poem* warns its reader that a thorn 'is very sharp' and

> [...] is evil for every *thegn* clutching it, immeasurably cruel to anyone who rests with it.[709]

The Anglo-Saxon poet responsible for the poetic adaptation of Boethius's poetry closely followed suit and professed a threefold soul nature of every human being (*saul* […] *þegna gehwilces*).[710] Some cases are less transparent, as in *Andreas* and *Descent into Hell*. In the former, 'God-fearing' Joshua and Tobias, Moses's kinsmen, are called brave *thegns*.[711] In the latter, John the Baptist, who witnesses Jesus open the doors of Hell, is styled a *thegn*. As surmised at p. 104, Joshua and Tobias may be *thegns* on the strength of their eventual service to God. John, too, in a broad sense is God's *thegn*.

But these two instances, just like all others in this collection, share one unifying and feature: in all of them, the presence of OE *þegn* (sometimes as a second element in a compound) is prompted by alliteration requirements more so than by an exact meaning. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Old English translation of Boethius's Meter 22. For illustrative purposes, it is worth quoting in full:

Hu mæg ænig man andsware findan ðinga æniges, þegen mid gesceade, þeah hine rinca hwilc rihtwislice æfter frigne, gif he awuht nafað on his mod-sefan mycles ne lytles rihtwisnesse ne geradscipes?[712]	How can any person, any rational being, find an answer to anything, though each person should inquire about it rightly, if he does not have a sense of right or discretion in his mind, whether a lot or a little?

Here, OE *þegn* is an obvious synonym for OE *rinc*. In poetry both figure as a conventional lexeme for "man", with contextual tailoring as needed: "warrior", "champion", "retainer", etc. Their simultaneous use in this fragment reflects hardly anything more than the metric and lexical constraints of Anglo-Saxon poetic art.[713] To conclude, on its own, OE *þegn* did not wield the semantics of "generic person" or "man in general". It was only brought in

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707 *Andreas*, ll. 235–248 and 1513–1516; *Descent into Hell*, ll. 53–55; *Daniel*, ll. 205–209; *Elene*, ll. 536–541; *Gifts of Men*, ll. 81–84; *Instructions for Christians*, ll. 141–149 and 177–180; metrical epilogue to *OEPC*, ll. 27–30; *Order of the World*, ll. 17–21; *Guthlac B*, ll. 1227–1234; *Vainglory*, ll. 44–50 and 77–81.

708 *Rune Poem*, ll. 7–9; *OEB* (verse), Meter 20 (ll. 182–183) and Metre 22 (ll. 43–48); Riddles, nos. 2, 35, 47, 52, 83.

709 Þ [*þorn*] *byþ ðearle scearp; ðegna gehwylcum anfeng ys yfyl, ungemetun reþe manna gehwylcun ðe him mid rested* (*Rune Poem*, ll. 7–9). For illustrative need, I allow myself to slightly change Robert Bjork's translation and retain "*thegn*".

710 *OEB* (verse), Meter 20, ll. 182–183.

711 *…modige mago-þegnas, magas sine, godfyrhte guman, Iosua ond Tobias* (*Andreas*, ll. 1513–1516).

712 *OEB* (verse), Meter 22, ll. 43–48.

713 The same technique is present in, e.g., the *Gifts of Men* (l. 83) when the poet enumerates God's endowment upon the morals and calls the benefit of agility a *gleo-dæda gife for gum-þegnum* ('gift of mirthful deeds before people'). Since OE *guma* is another poetic way of referring to men/people (DOE, *s.v.* "guma"), OE *gumþegn*, a *hapax legomenon*, is an alliterative and pleonastic syllable-holder in this line. *Cf.* above, n. 711.

when metres and genres called for it, and thus such uses are a clear example of hyponymy, very much like ON *drengr* (see VIGNETTE 2).

All the more interesting it is to find OE *þegn* in prose genres conveying somewhat similar senses. So far there have been discovered two relevant contemporaneous pieces.

One is Wulfstan's homily *Sermo ad Populum* ("Sermon to the People", 1012×1014 AD). CCCC MS 201 uniquely opens the text with a phrase evidentially built on a documentary precedent of a royal writ:

> Archbishop Wulfstan friendlily greets *thegns* among the people, ecclesiastics and laymen, all equally entrusted to him to guide them to God.[714]

This address formula is a hallmark of Anglo-Saxon epistolary correspondence genre and official royal documentation. OE adverb *frēondlīce* in such formulae was reserved for addressing people of equal or inferior position.[715] The alliterative expression "*thegns* among the people", to all appearances, was lifted by Wulfstan (or his later copyist) from poetry where it had rarely been used before.[716] The only reason why they would resort to it when addressing Wulfstan's flock must have been the collocation's alliterative appeal.

3.3.13 King's Subject

The other relevant piece, Ælfric's *Passion of St Edmund* (*c.* 993×1010 AD), is far more intriguing and emerges as important evidence for comparisons with Old Norse material when answering research QUESTION 3 in §5.3. The sense imbued in OE *þegn* in this instance is tailored so as to dissect it in this and not the previous section, despite telling parallels.

King Edmund ruled East Anglia in *c.* 855–869 AD until his kingdom was overrun by vikings, at whose hands he was killed. Later tradition would make him a martyr. When narrating the events that led to the king's demise, Ælfric puts the following lament and prophecy into the future martyr's mouth:

> "I wish and desire this in my heart—that I should not survive alone after my beloved thanes, who were slaughtered without warning in their beds with their wives and children by these seamen.'"[717]

This speech builds on a preceding episode of a stealthy attack when the viking chieftain of the "great heathen army" Hingvar (= ON Ingvarr) killed

> [...] the people—men and women and innocent children—and shamefully ill-treated innocent Christians.[718]

Besides narrative cohesiveness, the verbal parallelisms in the two passages and the use of the same OE verb *ofslēan* dispel any doubt and confirm that Ælfric was describing one and

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714 *Wulfstan arcebisceop greteð freondlice þegnas on ðeode, gehadode ⁊ læwede, ealle gemænelice þa ðe him betæhte sindon for gode to wissianne* (Beth 13, p. 225).

715 Timofeeva 2019, pp. 57–60.

716 *Guthlac B*, l. 1231, and *Vainglory*, l. 78. Perhaps, *Elene* (ll. 538–541) belongs to this list too, but the syntax is different: *Næfre we hyrdon hæleð ænigne on þysse þeode, butan þec nu ða, þegn oðerne þyslic cyðan ymb swa dygle wyrd* ('We have never heard any man from this nation, except you just now, any other attendant, speak thus about so secret an event').

717 *"Þæs ic gewilnige and gewisce mid mode—þæt ic ane ne belife æfter minum leofum þegnum, þe on heora beddum wurdon mid bearnum and wifum færlice ofslægene fram þysum flot-mannum"* (*LS* III, *Passion of St Edmund*, ll. 61–65).

718 *…Hinguar* […] *þa leode ofsloh—wæras and wif and þa unwittigan cild—and to bysmore tucode þa bile-witan Cristenan* (*LS* III, *Passion of St Edmund*, ll. 28–30).

the same event. What should arrest attention is the interchangeability the Abbot admitted for OE *leōde* and *þegnas* and the contexts in which he considered them proper. From a third-person narrator's perspective, the victims of a viking onslaught are generic people. But from a king's perspective, they are his *thegns* even if nothing in the text motivates such a definition in a strict sense. The most economical interpretation is that in this fragment OE *þegn* means "king's subject" without any further strings attached, and the fragment itself is a prime illustration of Richard Abels's remark, that

> [c]ertainly, the literary and hagiographical sources give no warrant for distinguishing between the king-subject and lord-client relationships.[719]

Ælfric and Wulfstan's *usus* in the two fragments just cited obviously builds upon and reflects that of contemporaneous royal chancery. As has been shown above (§3.3.11), a common way to capture all free strata in the Anglo-Saxon social order realised itself in various, in vernacular consistently alliterative or rhyming, formulae of the "elite *vs* rank-and-file" structure. In his first letter (1020 AD), King Cnut collectively addressed his people below bishops and earls as 'all his subjects in England, nobles and commoners, ecclesiastics and laymen'. There are examples of rhythmical alliteration peppered across the text,[720] and so the choice of OE *þeōdscipe* may have been provoked by the need to alliterate with "Þórketill" (inn Hávi; d. after 1023 AD):

Cnut cyning gret his arcebiscopas ⁊ his leodbiscopas ⁊ Þurcyl eorl ⁊ ealle his eorlas ⁊ ealne his þeodscype, twelfhynde ⁊ twyhynde, gehadode ⁊ læwede, on Englalande freondlice.[721]	King Canute sends friendly greetings to his archbishops and his diocesan bishops and Earl Thurkil and all his earls and all his subjects in England, nobles and commoners, ecclesiastics and laymen.

What exact vernacular phraseology underlay a similar greeting formula in Cnut's second letter (1027 AD), known only from a Latin translation, is hard to tell.[722] If it relied on alliteration and LAT. *toti genti Anglorum* stood in for putative OE *eall Angelcynn*, then, perhaps, LAT. *nobiles* translated putative OE *æþelboren* or *æþele*. OE *eorlas/ge eorle* are a weaker alternative, since earls, to compare with the first letter, get mentioned earlier in the formula (LAT. *primates*). Unless the unpreserved Old English original of the second letter indeed used a very rare OE formula *æþelboren ⁊ læsboren*, the most likely candidate for LAT. *nobiles et plebei* in this instance is by far the other most common variant, OE *twelfhynde ⁊ twyhynde* (see Table 1). Beside his first letter, this wording re-occurs in one of King Cnut's writs whereby at the end he friendly greets

719 Abels 1988, pp. 18–19.

720 …*hold hlaford* ('gracious lord'), *full friþ* ('perfect security') and *fullan fultume* ('abundant help'), *we ealle eadmodlice Gode ælmihtigum þancian þære mildheortnesse* ('we all humbly thank God Almighty for the mercy'), *he hine on earde adwæsce oððe ut of earde adræfe* ('driving him out of the country or crushing him'), *rihte domas deman* ('to pronounce just judgments'), *eallan mægene ⁊ eallon myhton* ('all our might and with all our strength'), *mægslagan ⁊ morðslagan ⁊ mansworan ⁊ wiccean ⁊ wælcyrian* ('[the deeds of] parricides, murderers, perjurers, witches, sorceresses'), *ealle men, earme ⁊ eadige* ('all men, both rich and poor'), *we magan ⁊ moton* ('we may [...] have power and permission').

721 Cn 1020:Prologue, p. 273.

722 *Canutus, rex totius Angliae et Denemarciae et Norreganorum et partis Suanorum, Æthelnotho metropolitano et Alfrico Eboracensi archiepiscopo omnibusque episcopis et primatibus et toti genti Anglorum tam nobilibus quam plebeiis, salutem* ('Canute, King of all England and Denmark and of Norway and part of Sweden, to Æthelnoth the Metropolitan, and to Ælfric, Archbishop of York, and to all the bishops and notables and the whole of the English nation, both nobles and commoners, greeting'; Cn 1027:Prologue, p. 276).

> [...] all my thegns, "twelve-hundreders" and "two-hundreders".[723]

No obligatory alliteration is on hand, and so the appearance of OE *þegn* must have been more than just mechanical.

Two Latin translations in *Quadripartitus* of the otherwise unpreserved Old English pieces of pre-Conquest royal legislation contain very similar additions of "elite *vs* rank-and-file" qualifiers to LAT. *t(h)aini*. The opening address in an epistolary response to King Æthelstan by the leading Kentishmen defines the local body politic as

> [...] your bishops in Kent, and all the thegns of that county, nobles and commoners.[724]

The Colyton ordinance (*c.* ? 943×946 AD) of King Edmund threatens to exact a 120-shilling fine from

> [...] the reeve or the thegn, the noble or commoner[725]

– for failing to act as surety for their (commended?) men and dwellers on estates. We may bet that the underlying vernacular phrase likely was OE **ge eorle*(*-isce*), *ge ceorle*(*-isce*), because *Quadripartitus* allows cross-checking this use against extant Old English legislation.[726] But understanding of these phrases eventually hinges on the syntax in which LAT. *comes et/vel villanus* can either elaborate on *thegns* or continue the list of groups of people. Both readings may be plausible. In *Quadripartitus*'s use further in the Kentish letter and in clause 3 of King Æthelstan's composite "fourth" code, LAT. *sic comites, sic villani* obviously augments preceding all-inclusive referents.[727] Conversely, clause 6 of the same code appears enumerating groups.[728] The bishops and reeves who promulgated the regulations of the London "peace guild" are also defined as *ægðer ge eorlisce ge ceorlisce*[729] But while a straightforward reading would connect this qualification with reeves (which in turn compares them with the Kentish *thaini*), it is syntactically detached, and perhaps this phrase was an independent augmentation.

Should the *thegns* in such instances have been intended as synonymous of OE *þeōdscipe* and thus covered "all king's subjects, elite and rank-and-file (alike)", or was its use rather terminological in the sense "all king's elite and rank-and-file agents"? With merely three attestations and forced conjectured reverse translations, the evidence is conflicted. One could argue for a non-mutually exclusive interpretation in the cited instances and should stay open to the idea that lexical variation and synonymity occurred depending on the

723 …*ealle mine þegnas. twelfhynde.* ⁊ *twihynde* (S 985).

724 *Episcopi tui de Kantia et omnes Cantescyræ thaini, comites et villani* (III As Prologue, p. 170).

725 …*praepositus vel tainus, comes vel villanus* (III Em 7:2, p. 191). It must be stressed that the author of *Quadripartitus* was very consistent in his Latin rendition of OE *þegn* through transliteration, and so OE *þegn* must have underlain his translation. On various approaches to native Old English vocabulary that Anglo-Norman adaptors used, see O'Brien 2011.

726 Af 4:2, p. 50; VI As Prologue, p. 173.

727 …*sit alterutrum quod sit, sic comitum sic villanorum* (III As 6, p. 170; Attenborough's translation, 'whatever his station in life', is as always correct but obscures the idea of complementarity in LAT. *alteruter*: lit. one or the other); …*sit quicumque sit, sic comitum, sic villanorum* ('...be he noble or commoner, whoever he may be'; IV As 3, p. 171).

728 …*sit liber, sit servus, sic comitum, sic villanorum, sit domina, sit pedissequa, sit quicumque sit, sic handhabbenda, sic non handhabbenda* ('...whether it is a freeman or a slave, a noble or commoner, or, if it is a woman, whether she is a mistress or a maid—whosoever it may be, whether taken in the act or not taken in the act'; IV As 6, p. 172).

729 VI As Prologue, p. 173.

perspective of the communicant. The Colyton stipulation under discussion actually built on clause 7 of the Kentish letter to King Æthelstan:

[Kentish letter:] Seventhly, every man shall stand surety for his own men against every [charge of] crime.[730]	[Colyton code:] And every man shall act as surety for his men and for all those who are under his protection and on his estate.[731]

The Kentish letter then lays out that should "anyone" (LAT. *aliquis*) have too many people to supervise, (s)he has to appoint trustworthy reeves in each vill of theirs, and if 'a lord or a reeve or any man' (*dominus vel praepositus vel aliquis homo*) fails to find sureties for people of ill-repute, they are liable to the penalties decreed at Grately.[732] LAT. *dominus* on this list occurs only in two manuscripts. But it did not have to be alien, because King Æthelred's later Woodstock code envisions a very similar situation: a lord (OE *hlāford*) of a person of ill-repute can either personally vouch for his man's legal integrity or delegate his own oath to a deputy – a reeve "worthy of performing it".[733] All things considered, LAT. *tainus* in the Colyton law must be synonymous with LAT. *omnis/aliquis homo* and is a lord in his own right who has men commended to him and may have reeves to assist him. In the royal discourse, such as the address formula of the Kentish letter that suspiciously resembles a reversed greeting formula from royal writs, it would have been natural for such persons to dance to the king's tune and refer to themselves as *thegns*, if that was how the king viewed them. Consider, for example, how King Edward the Confessor addressed the Kentish body politic as "his *thegns*" in a royal confirmation of a private grant to Canterbury previously judicially attested by "his *thegns*".[734] The same interplay between vernacular and Latin is attested in a unique writ of King William I. The king charged the sheriff of Somerset to supervise due payment of the so-called "Peter's pence"[735] due to the pope by "[...] my [i.e. the king's] men and then each *thegn* and their men". A later translator rendered this phrase in Latin as "[...] my [i.e. the king's] men and furthermore the free and unfree".[736] These "free" seem to correspond rather closely to LAT. *dominus*, *tainus*, *omnis/aliquis homo* from the translations cited above, but are also in good accord with the landlords from the Andover code and London "peace guild" (above, pp. 121–122).

That OE *þegn* in this royal discourse approached the sense "king's subject" or "king's men" with no personal commendation to define it can further be conjectured from obvious interchangeability of OE *ealle mīne burhwaru/burhmenn* (lit. citizens, town-dwellers) and *ealle mīne burhþegnas* in royal addresses in S 1103 and S 1153 (1052×1053 AD) and S 1119 (1042×1044 AD), 1149 (1051×1066 AD), and 1150 (1065×1066 AD), respectively. Nothing suggests any meaningful discrepancy in this use and, moreover, all five items are directed to the same two communities of Winchester and London. A circumstantial indication

730 *Septimum, ut omnis homo teneat homines suos in fideiussione sua contra omne furtum* (III As 7, p. 170).

731 *Et omnis homo credibiles faciat homines suos et omnes qui in pace et terra sua sunt* (III Em 7, p. 191).

732 The nearest clause in the Grately code must be II As 25:2, p. 164, which threatens a 120-shilling fine for insubordination – exactly what III Em 7:2, p. 191, metes out.

733 *…buton he ðone gerefan hæbbe ðe ðæs wyrðe sy þe þæt don mæge* (I Atr 1:2, p. 216).

734 *Eadweard cyngc gret Stigande ærce.b. ⁊ Harold eorl. ⁊ Wulfric abb . ⁊ Osweard. ⁊ ealle mine þegenas on Cent freondlice.* […] *ic wille þ[æt] se dóm stande þe mine ðegenas gedémdan* ('King Edward sends friendly greetings to Archbishop Stigand and Earl Harold and Abbot Wulfric and Osweard and all my thegns in Kent [...] for my will is that the judgment given by my thegns shall be upheld'; S 1090 [1053×1061 AD]).

735 On it, see Blair 2006, p. 441.

736 *…of minan mann, ⁊ syððan ælchen þegene anð hire mannu*; *…de hominibus meis et preter de liberis et servis* (Bates, *RRAN* 288 [*c.* 1068×1083 AD, and possibly 1080×1081 AD]).

in the same direction is perhaps S 1101 (1057×1060 AD) preserved only in a 15th-century translation that used MIDE *undurlynges*[737] for the putative OE **þegnas*.

***

A preliminary case can yet be made that by the end of the first millennium, the Cerdicings had certainly extended the lexical-conceptual terms of royal lordship to describe the relationship with (to borrow Ann Williams's apt definition once again) 'everybody, or at least everybody who mattered' of their subjects. The evidence in §3.4.4 would place the start of this process as early as in the late 9th century and single out tenurial relationships as the most obvious socio-legal conduit. That section combined with the chronology of semantic developments in §3.3.10 elucidate royal diplomas and writs as the chief known dissemination medium of such notions and their use. The foregoing section adds royal legislation of as early as the 930–940s on this list.

3.3.14 Summary and Implications for Ensuing Research

Methodologically, the first half of CHAPTER 3 above represented the *first stage* of research on Old English material. It also pursued to elucidate an answer to research QUESTION 1, *viz.* the bearing OE *þegn*'s lexicography potentially had on late Anglo-Saxon society. Given the length this semantic study has reached, it is worth collating the results of the analysis above and drawing preliminary conclusions.

Over the course of its long history, OE *þegn* reveals both a very strong semantic core and flexible semantic periphery, and was besides readily used to form new composites. From the available data, it would appear that OE *þegn* was inherited by Old English from its linguistic predecessor (probably from Proto-Germanic), with the central meaning "a person who serves" and nothing more. This textual conclusion also corroborates the linguistic evidence of the recently revisited etymology of OE *þegn* (see EXCURSUS 1). All other meanings seem to be derivative and contextually conditioned. The word never connoted humiliating or debasing servitude, as imbued in, e.g., OE *þēow*. Quite the contrary, serving as a *thegn* was socially valued and approved of, to an extent that people in service to the highest lords (kings) passed under this title. Such qualities ensured the word's absorption into the *comitatus* lexical-semantical field which it never left since. Following the spread of Christianity, it in turn enabled OE *þegn*'s successful transpositing and proliferation in the religious register that modelled the heavenly order and relationships between mortals and the divine on a familiar worldly template from the audience's *Erfahrungsraum*. This high esteem of *thegnly* service probably explains why Biblical figures of high reverence easily became God's *thegns* in Old English religious outlook. Common were ideas of devotion to a cause, loyalty to the verge of death, compliance with a lord's will (*cf.* Job and Offa), military prowess and "manliness" in behaviour. In short, as a literary concept, Anglo-Saxon *thegn* could be best summarised as an idealised retainer in service of a divine or worldly superior, and within a martialised society, equally apt for exalted service in times of peace and war.

In the secular sphere of the Anglo-Saxon society, OE *þegn* and its circulation in first-hand sources demonstrate two unmistakable patterns. One is that, contrary to previous research summarised in §2.2, above, the corpus search failed to find indisputable situations when OE *þegn* would be used for non-royal commended persons in and of itself. Of the histori-

737 According to MED (*s.v.* "underling 1b"), this lexeme could, among other, mean "subject", although this argument can go only so far on such indirect and polysemantic evidence.

cally attested individuals, OE *þegn* appears reserved first and foremost for the selected few in royal service – the social group of kings' liegemen, in short. We cannot dismiss offhand that some Anglo-Saxons under non-royal lords' patronage could have been known to contemporaries as *thegns*. But the historical evidence within non-documentary, literary accounts in Old English is rather slim and may very well be explained as an influence from monarchocentric genres. This has an important bearing, for as discussed in §2.2.2.3, *thegns* are sometimes seen as a widespread pyramidal social group (often called "class") in which (non-)royal service underlay a tentative hierarchy. The trend changes at the chronological onset of the second lexicographical pattern when, at the latest, by the beginning of King Æthelred's reign and especially its middle years, OE *þegn* had expanded its semantics and started denoting elite more generally and also locally, as its recycling in the "elite *vs* rank-and-file" and "good/elder people" formulae shows. Crucially, it is then that OE *þegn* gained a wider circulation in actual social context without a previously indispensible *genetivus possessivus*. On hand is a semantic shift: from a social category of free servants *thegns* become a broad(er) elite social group, or in the conceptual terminology proposed in the Chapter 1 (Figure 1), a (localised) aristocracy. One of the premises, if not the main among them, for their social power surely was landed proprietorship. An association between it and OE *þegn* not necessarily predicated on personal royal service of every single individual thus called is indubitably illustrated first in the 960s (and tentatively in the 940s) in the legal statements coming from a royal chancery, and later in a wider array of sources too.

These lexicographical facts are already of self-sufficient importance just as they are. As much as the role of kingship in forming/manipulating/interacting with Anglo-Saxon elites is well-recognised, *thegns*, due to dominance of the Wulfstanesque "reference model" and subsequent lack of interest for them for their own sake, somewhat hang in a vacuum. The arrived at contribution to answering research Question 1 can be summarised thusly: contrary to the received impression that *thegns* had always been an ideal-typical elite Anglo-Saxon social group must be recognised the fact of its late formation in consequence of specific historical circumstances and pertinence to a concrete and limited historical period.

A feasible explanatory model of these conceptual changes may have to do with a consequential side effect of the social processes ensuing from royal policies of the 10th century, addressed in greater detail in the second half of the chapter. It suffices to say here that it was the royal discourse that ultimately lent, or perhaps even imposed, its prestigious language on these social shifts, which was probably imitated by non-royal lords as well. The prestige surely had both a material – intensification, deeper penetration of royal governance in the second half of the 10th century, – and spiritual – adoption of new, increasingly theocratic ideology of kingship,[738] – backgrounds to it. The main medium of this dissemination must have been royal documentation of three (known) types, namely royal diplomas, legislation, and (precursors to/embryonic forms of) writs.

It was nevertheless a matter of generations that, by the end of the 10th century, OE *þegn* irreversibly widened its semantics and syncretised notions of royal lordship and its language, social status of local elite, and visible distinctive material affluence. All of them were vividly captured in a unique use of OE *þegnscipe* by an anonymous adaptator of Caesarius of Arles. By conflating textual evidence of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Ælfric's *Passion of St Edmund*,

738 As these problematics exceed the scope of the present book, interested readers may find a good exposition by McCann 2018.

we might interpret that, perhaps, in the eyes of Devonshire and Somerset communities, it was *their* local thirty good *thegns* that got killed repulsing Earl Harold's raid of 1052 AD, but in the eyes of King Edward the Confessor, they were notionally *his thegns* all the same.

3.4 The Anglo-Saxon *Thegn*

In line with the suggested three stages of research, the section below corresponds to the *second stage* (above, §1.7.1). More specifically, it addresses QUESTION 2 on the research question list and explores the social dimension(s) of Anglo-Saxon historical *thegns*. The broad array of available sources allows addressing all of its five outlined sub-questions: wealth and landed property, geography, participation in social networks, power structures, legal standing. With the importance attached to an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*'s legal side, it will be studied first and argued that it pertained to royal lordship more than to anything else. With that in mind, the sub-chapter will dwell on the known facets of lordship extending over kings' *thegns* as their agents of influence and power. Next, with the help of documentary material, the geographical aspect of this relationship will be studied, and its two-way character will be posited. The two final sections will discuss matters of landed proprietorship and local power functions in hands of Anglo-Saxon *thegns*.

3.4.1 Legal Thegnship

As established in §3.3, in a purely literary dimension OE *þegnscipe* was deeply rooted in the context of *comitatus* and denoted the *comitatus* itself, relationship of fealty of a retainer towards his lord, *comitatus*-like soldierly virtues, or exalted social and material status derived from all of the above. The same native lexeme also occurs in extant Anglo-Saxon legislation, and this allows us to address one of the research sub-questions of QUESTION 2, namely, what is known about legal aspects of a *thegn*'s role in Anglo-Saxon social structure.

In Anglo-Saxon legislation, OE *þegnscipe* clearly denotes some social condition recognised by law, which is exactly one of the foci of the present study. As such social condition, it figures only in two sources. One is Archbishop Wulfstan's historical-legal fiction, the *Canons of Edgar*. This text, probably aimed at 'the wayward clergy of York Minster', upon completion was likely intended by the Archbishop to 'assert the moral obligations of the Church to the secular community, and as a handbook for pastoral clergy'.[739] Under his pen, *thegnship* becomes something a priest who lives a canonically orderly life can be "worthy of" (*þegnscipes wyrþe*), 'both in life and in death' (*ge on life ge on legere*) and is most probably synonymous with his status (OE *wyrðscipe*, lit. honour, acknowledgement of worth) that will diminish if he does not.[740]

Wulfstan, as he does elsewhere, conceives of *thegns* as having a legally defined noble rank (*der Stand*, as per Max Weber), and *thegnship* in the *Canons of Edgar*, however vague, is clearly in the same vein. Corroborations to this effect come from his insistent repetitions of the same provision in his other texts where the Archbishop prefers OE *þegnwer* and/or *þegnlagu* (lit. *thegn*'s *wergild* and *thegn*'s law) over OE *þegnscipe*.[741] At first glance, while this reading seemingly offers a rather straightforward definition with far-reaching conclusions

739 Rabin 2015, pp. 85–86.
740 *Canons of Edgar*, chap 68b (Jost X65b).
741 V Atr 9:1–2, p. 240; VI Atr 5:3–4, p. 248; VIII Atr 28–29, p. 266 (repeats the *Canons of Edgar* almost verbatim save the substitutions just mentioned), I Cn 6:2a, p. 290; Að 2, p. 464; Nap 50 (35), p. 270 (ll. 30–32).

about Anglo-Saxon social structures, as argued in §2.2.3, Wulfstanian evidence is not without its caveats. Projecting later sources onto earlier conditions might risk anachronism. In accordance with the chosen methodology, therefore, Wulfstan's testimony will be for the moment put to the side and later read alongside other evidence.

3.4.1.1 *thegnship* in the Andover code

This only other legal evidence is King Edgar's already cited Andover code. The clause in question draws on a similar stipulation in the Exeter code of King Æthelstan from about three decades prior to it (? 934 AD).[742] Both legislate on injustice in court and mete out essentially one and the same penalty, though phrasing and legal contexts somewhat vary:

> [Exeter code] [§1:2]. And any reeve who neglects this, and pays no heed to it, shall pay [the fine] for insubordination to the king,[743] if he is justly accused. [§1:3]. And any reeve who takes bribes, and frustrates thereby the just claims of another, shall pay the fine for insubordination to the king, and suffer also such disgrace as we have ordained. [§1:4]. And if it is a thegn who acts thus, the same punishment shall be inflicted.[744]

> [Andover code] And a judge who gives a false judgment against another man shall pay 120 shillings as compensation to the king, unless he is prepared to declare on oath that he did not know how to give a more just decision; and he shall forfeit for ever his *thegnship*, unless he redeem it from the king on such terms as the king will allow him. And the bishop of the diocese shall exact the compensation on the king's behalf.[745]

As in the case of other Andover laws, Wulfstan in his œuvre written under King Cnut's aegis reproduced this Andover stipulation almost verbatim. It differed stylistically only in the first half which (supposedly?) narrowed down the applicability of this norm to the territories under the "English law" as opposed to the "Danish law", where the same transgression was penalised by a *lahslit* (lit. law-breach).[746] In view of its derivativity, this evidence is largely secondary and helps little to elucidate the legal sense of *thegnship*.

Needless to say, for the purposes of this study, one would wish to know far more about the nature of *thegnship* in the Andover and King Cnut's codes: what did it entail? Was it some sort of legal privilege? Was it connected to *wergild*? Was it hereditary? Was this status ascribed or achieved? Though Wulfstan's texts, including the *Canons of Edgar*, supposedly answer such and similar questions, the current section will seek the solution in earlier and non-Wulfstanian legal prose.

3.4.1.2 reeves in the Andover code and beyond

At first sight, King Edgar's legal staff left no easy solutions. But a concise lexical and legal contextualisation may offer a way out. The single most important hint to start with is that the *thegn* in clause 1:2 of King Æthelstan's Exeter codification rather merely elaborates on

742 Wormald 1999, p. 439.

743 120 shillings, as first established in I Ew 2:1, p. 140; and II Ew 3:2, p. 142. See also below, n. 763.

744 [§1:2]. ⁊ *swylc gerefa swylc ðis foregemeleasie* ⁊ *ymbe beon nylle, gesylle ðam cinge his oferhyrnesse, gif hit man him ongerecce mid sope.* [§1:3]. ⁊ *swylc gerefa swylc medsceat nime* ⁊ *oþres ryht ðurh þæt alecge, gylde þæs cinges oferhyrnesse* ⁊ *wege eac ða ungerisnu, swa swa we gecweden habbað.* [§1:4]. ⁊ *gif hit sy ðegen ðe hit dó, sy þæt ilce* (V As 1:2–4, p. 168).

745 ⁊ *se dema, se ðe oðrum on woh gedeme, gesylle þam cynge hundtwelfti scill' to bote – butan he mid aðe gecyðan durre, þæt he hit na rihtor ne cuðe –* ⁊ *þolige á his þegnscipes, butan he hine eft æt þæm cynge gebigge, swa he him geðafian wille;* ⁊ *ámanige þære scyr biscop þa bote to ðæs cynges handa* (III Eg 3, pp. 200–202). I allowed myself to alter Robertson's original translation of OE *þegnscipe,* 'rank as a thegn'.

746 II Cn 15:1, p. 318. The expression "English law" (OE *Engla lagu*) gets its first recording in I Atr Prologue, p. 216 (*c.* ? 997 AD), and is then readily picked up by Wulfstan in opposition to *Dena lagu*. That this "Danish law" is a complex expression of ethnic peculiarity within a geographic district is substantiated by Pons-Sanz 2007a, pp. 70–72. For recent research on some particular facets of the "Danish law", see Stattel 2019.

actions and judicial functions of a reeve in the preceding clause. The reeve, both the Old English term and office, prompted much in-depth research,[747] on which the enquiry will rely.

Tom Lambert posits that the reeves in this clause 'were not just the king's reeves' but 'those working for other lords as well'. The essence of his argument is that profits of justice did not solely belong to Anglo-Saxon kings but were included in the 'standard package' of legal and fiscal rights donated by sovereign rulers to ordained and lay magnates as secular reward or religious endowment.[748] Lambert in fact amasses a convincing body of references in laws to such non-royal recipients. He then maintains that collecting these revenues and, accordingly, executing judicatory duties was in the hands of such non-royal beneficiaries' reeves. To strengthen this argument, a few sources are brought in. One is the clause from the Exeter code under discussion, and to avoid recursion, it must be laid aside. The other reveals itself in King Edmund's Colyton ordinance, also discussed above (pp. 134–135). The silence regarding royal service on the part of reeves and *thegns*, a similar lack of specification in King Edward the Elder's earlier address to 'all reeves' (*eallum gerefum*), and a penalty for their failure to exact due fines or hold monthly assemblies,[749] should indicate that 'the king was trying to command not just his own reeves but those working for other lords as well'. *Thegns* in the Exeter and Colyton legal pronouncements following this line of reasoning are

> [...] figures who had served in the household of the king or a great magnate, perhaps most commonly as a warrior but not necessarily, and been rewarded with a grant of the king's non-military rights over land. [my emphasis][750]

Indeed, as elucidated by James Lloyd, OE *gerēfa* 'is a gloriously unspecific word' and denotes 'an official who works for a higher authority, such as a lord or a king' who thereby lends such person their authority.[751] Chelsea Shields-Más also collected conclusive evidence of the application of OE *gerēfa* to estate managers in private employ from a handful of late vernacular sources: two estate memoranda,[752] two managerial manuals,[753] four private wills,[754] and two leases.[755] At the same time, while the absolute majority of dozens of legal references to reeves are ex- or implicitly to agents of kings, at least twelve legal fragments[756] expressly mention private reeves.

Without doing injustice to Lambert's proposition as a whole, which is otherwise well-grounded, there remain reasons to believe that King Æthelstan legislated on royal officials after all. In his law-codes and ordinances,[757] this monarch multiple times unmistak-

747 Most recently, to my knowledge, in two independent doctoral projects by Chelsea Shields-Más and Jake Lloyd (see above, n. 63).
748 For more details about bookland, see Vignette 3.
749 I Ew Prologue, p. 138; and II Ew 2, 8, pp. 142, 144.
750 Lambert 2017, quotations *passim* at pp. 125–128.
751 Lloyd 2014, pp. 81–82.
752 Tidenham (Gloucs.): S 1555 (956×1065 AD; Rob 109); Hurstborne Priors (Hants.): S 359 (formally 900 AD but most certainly from the 11th century; Rob 110).
753 *Rectitudines* and *Be gesceadwisan gerefan* (hereafter *Gerefa*) (*Gesetze* I, pp. 444–455).
754 S 1494 (962×991 AD; *Wills* 14), 1497, 1519, 1521 (1035×1044 AD; *Wills* 29).
755 S 1281 (904 AD; Rob 18) and S 1425 (1049×1052 AD).
756 Ine 63, p. 118; III As 7:1–3, p. 170; VI As 8:2–3, p. 178–179; II Eg 2, p. 196; IV Eg 13:1, p. 212; I Atr 1:2, p. 216; VIII Atr 8, p. 262; I Cn 8:2, p. 292; II Cn 30:1, pp. 330–332.
757 An important point to remember is that the six codes from this reign traditionally labelled "As" or "Æthelstan" are a particularly heterogenous group. Not all of them were promulgated in king's name. See further studies in Keynes 1990, pp. 235–241; Foot 2011, pp. 136–148; Roach 2013 (esp. pp. 468–477).

ably addresses or commands his reeves,[758] most vividly when threatening to exact a fine for insubordination and replace any of them who is not willing to comply with his orders.[759] Such possessiveness appears in line with, for example, the standard address formulae in much later royal writs aimed at "king's" people.[760] Occasionally, kings addressed "all my [= king's] reeves" in such-and-such shire.[761] Demands for fair justice and injunctions against corruption on the part of kings' reeves, close to the precedent in the Exeter and Andover codes, are repeated in King Cnut's reign, and not just in Wulfstan's pieces.[762] It is likewise observable that reeves' transgressions count as insubordination to the king (OE *oferhīrness*) punishable by a 120-shilling fine to kings, not third-party lords.[763] With one exception,[764] this penalty is meted out to reeves wherever the law fixes an exact sum to be paid by them. Throughout the 10th and 11th centuries, this is a specifically royal fine. Whereas in earlier West Saxon law it covers offences against private individuals as well,[765] beginning with Edward the Elder, kings reserve this sum exclusively for the Crown.[766] Finally, no private historical *thegns* are known before Bishop Oswald's lease series in the 960s, and even they treat his *thegns* as tenants, hardly as agents of the law. Revealingly, in King Æthelstan's laws *thegns* stand next not only to king's reeves but, like in royal writs, also king's ealdormen and bishops – all acting as civil officials.[767] The same nomenclature and functions delegated to people on this list find a full analogue in Bishop Asser's (d. 909) semi-hagiography life depiction of King Alfred (composed in 893 AD):

> For by gently instructing, cajoling, urging, commanding, and (in the end, when his patience was exhausted) by sharply chastising those who were d i s o b e d i e n t and by despising popular stupidity and stubbornness in every way, he carefully and cleverly exploited and converted his b i s h o p s and e a l d o r m e n and nobles, and his t h e g n s most dear to him, and r e e v e s as well (in all of whom, after the Lord and the king, the authority of the entire kingdom is seen to be invested, as is appropriate), to his own will and to the general advantage of the whole realm. [my emphasis][768]

758 "My reeves": I As Prologue, 1, 4, p. 146; As Alms Prologue, p. 148; II As 25, p. 164; "our reeves": II As 3:2, p. 152; "his reeves": VI As 11, p. 182.

759 II As 25, p. 164.

760 "My/his earls", "my/his bishops", "my/his sheriffs", "my/his thegns", etc. *Cf.* how King Æthelred 'advises and commands his bishops and earls and ealdormen and all his reeves' (*suadet et mandat episcopis suis et comitibus et aldremannis et praepositis omnibus*; IV Atr 8, p. 236) in his composite "fourth" code. This text is extant only in *Quadripartitus*, but as demonstrated by Naismith 2019, the second part copied and translated some lost piece of vernacular legislation that had to precede King Æthelred's Wantage code.

761 S 986 (*Writs* 28), 987 (*Writs* 29) (both from 1020 AD), AND 1088 (1052×1066 AD; *Writs* 33; details could have been altered).

762 Cn 1020:11, p. 274, and II Cn 69:1–2, p. 356. *Cf.* also Cn 1027:12, p. 277, and S 987, in the latter of which King Cnut forbids 'any injustice, no matter who may be reeve', against the Archbishop of Canterbury (*ic nelle na gefafian þæt man þam bisceope ænige unlage beode beo gerefa se þe beo*).

763 Reeves' insubordination is mentioned in II Ew 3:2, p. 142; II As 25, p. 164; IV As 7, p. 172; V As 1:2, p. 168; VI As 8:4, 11, p. 172, 182; III Em 7:2, p. 191 (also above, p. 134). Insubordination more generally comes up in I Ew 2:1, p. 140; II Ew 7, p. 144; I As 5, p. 148; II As 20–20:2, p. 160; IV Atr 6, 9:2, pp. 234, 236; II Cn 29:1, p. 330 (sum not specified). On this regal right to give orders and exact fines for breaking them, see Lambert 2017, pp. 213–214. On the 120-shilling fines, including the ideology of transgressions of king's establishments, see Taylor 2012, pp. 301–303.

764 As Alms 2, p. 148; this stipulation has a 30-shilling fine for a reeve.

765 Ine 6:3, 13, 70, pp. 92, 94, 118–120; and Af 2:1 (fine to a community), 8, 9:1, 10, 28, 38:1, pp. 48, 54, 56, 66, 72.

766 With merely one exception: II As 11, p. 156.

767 IV As 6:2, 7, p. 172; V As 1:2–4, p. 168; VI As 11, p. 182.

768 *Nam assidue suos e p i s c o p o s et c o m i t e s ac nobilissimos, sibique dilectissimos suos m i n i s t r o s, necnon et p r a e p o s i t o s, quibus post Dominum et regem omnis totius regni potestas, sicut dignum, subdita videtur, leniter docendo, adulando,*

There thus is reason to see that reeves in King Æthelstan's Exeter were, in all probability, king's functionaries charged with duties of governance[769] on his behalf[770] and that the omission of the possessive "my" may in fact indicate its contextual redundancy to the legislator.[771]

3.4.1.3 *thegnship* and the dialectics of *Königsnähe*

Establishing these facts about reeves facilitates understanding the nature of *thegnship* in the Andover code. Save VI As 11, in King Æthelstan's legal corpus,[772] *thegns* share with reeves the same responsibilities and penalties. Asser and his admittedly panegyrical biography of King Alfred once again illuminates, at great detail and with superb literary flamboyance, the consequences of falling into the king's disgrace due to ab- or misuse of justice. His text echoes Kings Æthelstan, Edgar, and Cnut's laws and the causes of injustice in court provided therein:

> [...] if he could identify any corruption in those judgements, he would ask the judges concerned politely, as is his wont, either in person or through one of his other trusted men, why they had passed so unfair a sentence – whether through ignorance or because of some other malpractice (that is to say, either for love or fear of the one party or for hatred of the other, or even for the sake of a bribe)... [if the judge confessed ignorance, Alfred would present them a choice of either stepping down or going through schooling] Having heard these words, the ealdormen and reeves were terrified and chastened as if by the greatest of punishments, and they strove with every effort to apply themselves to learning what is just. As a result nearly all the ealdormen and reeves and thegns (who were illiterate from childhood) applied themselves in an amazing way to learning how to read, preferring rather to learn this unfamiliar discipline (no matter how laboriously) than to relinquish their offices of power. [my emphasis][773]

Aside from the 120 shillings payable for insubordination, punishments for reeves (and, probably, by extension *thegns*) here and elsewhere include property confiscations and/or

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hortando, imperando, ad ultimum inoboedientes, post longam patientiam, acrius castigando, vulgarem stultitiam et pertinaciam omni modo abominando, ad suam voluntatem et ad communem totius regni utilitatem sapientissime usurpabat et annectebat (*VÆR*, chap 91, p. 78). Asser's authorship had at some point been questioned, first by Vivian Galbraith and then Alfred Smyth. The latter's arguments have since been criticised. The heated polemics that unfolded (most stoutly, on pure philological grounds, by Lapidge 2003a, pp. 44–47, with references to earlier critical reviews by Simon Keynes; Smyth published an earlier response in Smyth 2002, pp. xiii–xx, also with references to unwelcoming reviews) has not, to my knowledge, culminated in a unanimous re-attribution of Alfred's biography.

769 OE *steōre healdan* (lit. to hold rudder, to steer), in the language of VI As 11, p. 182. *Cf.* IV Eg 1:5, p. 208: the lawmaker enjoins the king's reeves to "steer" in accordance with his ordinance. See above, n. 622.

770 Such was the previous opinion of, e.g., Felix Liebermann (*Gesetze* III, p. 109).

771 E.g., VI As 11, p. 182 opens with the king's command to 'his bishops and his *ealdormen*, and all his reeves throughout his dominions' (*his bisceopum ⁊ his ealdormannum ⁊ his gerefum eallum ofer ealne minne ánweald*; italics in the original translation) but drops "my/his" before "reeve" later on (*þonne beo se gerefa*, 'the reeve shall be') because of its contextual implication. Similarly, the town reeves, verbally not identified as king's, should pay church tithes of king's property (I As Prologue, p. 148). Clearly, King Æthelstan bade *his* reeves, as he disposed of *his* own property, especially in view of his later command in the same stipulation to his reeves (*mine gerefan*), ealdormen, and bishops to pay tithes of *their* property (*on heora agenum gode*).

772 See above, n. 767.

773 *…si aliquam in illis iudiciis iniquitatem intelligere posset, leniter utens suatim illos ipsos iudices, aut per se ipsum aut per alios suos fideles quoslibet interrogabat, quare tam nequiter iudicassent, utrum per ignorantiam aut propter aliam quamlibet malevolentiam, id est utrum pro aliquorum amore vel timore aut aliorum odio aut etiam pro alicuius pecuniae cupiditate.* […] *Quibus auditis verbis, perterriti <ac> veluti pro maxima vindicta correcti, comites et praepositi ad aequitatis discendae studium totis viribus se vertere nitebantur, ita ut mirum in modum illiterati ab infantia comites pene omnes, praepositi ac ministri literatoriae arti studerent, malentes insuetam disciplinam quam laboriose discere, quam potestatum ministeria dimittere* (*VÆR*, chap 106, pp. 93–94).

forfeiture of office and/or the king's favour (OE *frēondscipe*, LAT. *amicitia*, lit. friendship).[774] The latter two apparently formed a complementary pair.[775] Forfeit of the king's "friendship" and with it presumably one's *thegnship*, removal from the office and thereby apparent loss of revenues and social capital turn out to have been intended as a potent sanction to control agents of the Crown. It is, perhaps, the combination of these attributes of *thegnship* that informed the lexical choice of the author of homily 7 of MS Bodley 343, examined (above, pp. 114–115). Their idiosyncratic approach to translating his source allows for a certain scope of interpretation. But the homily leaves no doubt that by the 11th century *thegnship* was deeply entrenched in the lexical and, apparently, societal context of affluence and valued social position, and very possibly facilitated by royal service.

This latter interpretation is further corroborated by King Edgar's *Wihtbordesstan* legislation. Its declarative part lays out the king's vision of the due legal and social order and contributing components thereto. It is instructive – both from legal and lexical perspectives – that immediately after reserving for himself the same royal prerogatives (*cynescipes gerihta*) 'in every borough and shire' as were his father's, King Edgar confirms to his *thegns* the same status (OE *scipe*) as they held under his father.[776] *Scipe* in this sense seems to be a *hapax legomenon*. OE *cynescipe* (lit. kingship) in this edict is a new formation likely coined by Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester (in office 963–984), one of the intellectual leaders of the Benedictine reform.[777] Agnes Robertson evidently made the right lexical connexion between Edgar's own *cynescipe* and his *thegns*' *scipe*. Her putative extension of the latter to **þegnscipes gerihta*[778] is harder to substantiate in the face of the fact that royal *gerihta*, at least in the 11th century, apparently covered fines payable for breach of king's protection. Tom Lambert made a strong case for kings' expansion of protection and more aggressive assertion of the rights to such revenues at the expense of non-royal recipients.[779] But no other text mentions **þegnscipes gerihta* whatsoever. On the contrary, the composition of the clause in question could be non-coincidental. Rather than legislating on two matters – the contrast between the king's and his *thegns*' rights – the clause might instead be augmenting just one. First the king commits to a general continuity with the previous reign in his claims to legal revenues, and then he commits to a particular continuity in the mechanism of their management – very probably rewarded by their portion, *cf.* the "earl's third penny" – at the hands of his *thegns* who started under his father. The status of a king's *thegn* in the *Wihtbordesstan* edict is thus derivative of the royal status and points towards royal service, quite possibly remunerated, as its main component.

774 II As 25:2, p. 164; VI As 11, p. 282; IV Eg 1:5, p. 208; Cn 1020:11, p. 274; Cn 1027:12, p. 277. Stripping violators of king's land and legal grants of king's favour is also further provided for in writs: S 1088 (1042×1050 AD; *Writs* 33), 1089 (1052×1066 AD; *Writs* 34; authenticity imperfect), 1091 (1042×1050 AD; *Writs* 39), 1162 (1060×1061 AD). *Cf.* also how King Æthelred's "eighth" code (likely 1014 AD: Wormald 1999, p. 336) speaks of the royal reeves' obligation to assist abbatial stewards (*wicneran*) if they wish to have God and the king's favour (VIII Atr 32, p. 267). King Cnut's secular code makes a somewhat similar provision, granting God and (private) lord's favour to truthful witnesses (II Cn 23:1, p. 326). Kings' addresses in writ formulae invariably include "friendly" greetings to their subordinates (OE [*cyning*] *grētað freōndlīce his…*).

775 For a specifically Anglo-Saxon case of political "friendship", see Pratt 2007, pp. 37–38; Barrow 1999. For a broader European context, see papers in the same volume.

776 IV Eg 2a, p. 208.

777 Lund 2023, pp. 57–59.

778 Robertson 1925, p. 307.

779 Lambert 2017, pp. 332–336.

As an extra-legal and external source, MS Bodley 343 might thus be casting light, on the one hand, upon the consequences of royal policy towards king's *thegns* as his agents – concomitant accretion of wealth and status, – and on the other, the motives of Wulfstan's lexical choice in the *Canons of Edgar* and beyond in his visions of an "orderly society".

An important aspect in this bilateral relationship appears to have been (dis)obedience to their king. Most Latin royal diplomas stipulate in their dispositive parts that a donation was a consequence of recipients' submissiveness (LAT. *oboedientia*, *humilitas*, *subjectio*, etc.; often "pleasing", LAT. *amabilis*) to the donor's will. As this is a recurring phrase, at first glance it might appear to be nothing more than an indispensable formulaic element in diplomatic rhetoric. While such interpretation contains an indisputable core of the truth, a comparison with parallel Old English terminology can make one think that such statements had some concrete material repercussions. One of only two genuine fully vernacular Anglo-Saxon royal diplomas, the aforementioned grant by King Beorhtwulf (above, p. 118) conveys the beneficiary's right to dispose of the donation at his own discretion thus:

> [...] to give after his day to whoever has earned it from him by humble obedience...[780]

The choice of OE *hīrness* to convey this idea is striking on account of its antonymy to OE *oferhīrness*, so frequently called upon in royal legislation. The same OE *hīrness* on the part of *thegns* toward the donor later surfaces in Bishop Oswald's lease series (above, p. 141 and below, p. 193). The lexical-semantical complementarity of the two could not be any more conspicuous: *hīrness*, "obedience", leads to material reward, while *oferhīrness*, "insubordination", causes downfall and punishment, which is similar to the red thread in *Swerian* (discussed below, §3.4.2.1).

At the end of this investigation, legal *thegnship* emerges as a symmetrical counterpart to royal *frēondscipe* and together they form two ends of a reciprocal, even if uneven, relationship between an Anglo-Saxon monarch and his liegemen. To relate *thegnship* to broader medieval research, it is feasible that the royal *frēondscipe–thegnship* dyad was a particular case of *Königsnähe*. Anglo-Saxons in royal service and under king's lordship were obliged to render loyalty and compliance to their liege and in return were entitled to the king's favour and material benefits but simultaneously subject to his commands too.[781] *Thegns*' *Königsnähe* and its liabilities were acutely realised by contemporaries themselves: it is hardly coincidental that Wulfstan puts the king's *thegns* who literally "are next to him" (OE *him nīehsta sindon*) on top of the *heriot* list (see APPENDIX 2). From the king's perspective, violation of these "terms and conditions", to use a modern analogy, by the inferior party was viewed as insubordination that led to revoking of king's *frēondscipe* and termination of this relationship. From the inferior party's perspective, this in turn meant termination of their *thegnship*, which, however, could be brokered back on a case-by-case principle.

3.4.1.4 legal *thegnship* in practice

A glimpse into these and similar principles at work can be found in King Æthelred's diplomas issued in his mid-reign. In 987 AD, he remunerated his 'very loyal servant'[782] Æthelsige with a land estate at Bromley (Kent). Eleven years later, the man lost his favour with the

780 *…to siollanne . ðæm ðe hit wille mið eaðmodre hernisse him to ge eornigan . ofer his daeg…* (S 204).

781 E.g. King Æthelstan commands 'the reeve in every borough [...] by his friendship' (*þam gerefan to gehwylcere byrig* […] *be minum freondscipe beode*; I As Prologue, p. 148).

782 *…mihi oppido fideli ministro* (S 864 [987 AD]).

king. Æthelred revoked the grant and restored it to the Rochester see, from which Bromley had been expropriated at Æthelsige's own instigation in the first place. Moreover, he is also said to have killed a king's reeve who was protecting the estate. King's friendship, consequently, turned into king's animosity, and Æthelsige was proclaimed 'a wretched enemy of Almighty God and of all the people'.[783] This declaration, in fact, may have had a concrete legal side to it: long before, King Æthelstan threatened those of his subjects who attempted to take revenge on behalf of non-compliers with his will, or feuding with those who killed such dissidents, with 'the hostility of the king and all his friends'.[784] Here we deal with a classical case of "my friends/enemies are your friends/enemies" found in many social networks locked onto one person (*cf. Swerian*: below, *passim*). We do not have the means to tell if the punishment of outlawry was meted out, but for his crimes Æthelsige was deprived

> [...] of every honour [LAT. *dignitas* = OE *scipe*?] so that he who had unjustly taken the possessions of others should justly lose his own.[785]

There can further be found a very similar account of a disgrace incurred by one Wulfgeat, a contemporary of Æthelsige. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s terse account merely states that in 1006 AD, Wulfgeat was stripped of all his possessions,[786] but the medieval historian John of Worcester supplied more information. John provided his father's name (Leofeca) and believed that though King Æthelred 'had loved [Wulfgeat] more than almost all others', the confiscation 'of his possessions and of every dignity' (LAT. *honor* = OE *scipe*?) was due to 'the unjust judgements and arrogant deeds he had perpetrated'.[787] Wulfgeat's name first enters King Æthelred's diplomas in the 980s,[788] and from 993 AD it figures regularly in association with Wulfric *Spot*, a major landholder in Staffordshire and Derbyshire, and Wulfheah's, very possibly the son of Wulfric's brother, Ealdorman Ælfhelm (on them below, p. 159), mentioned by John in the same annal. John's details accord with a diploma in which one Wulfgeat was described as "beloved" (LAT. *dilectus*),[789] so chances are he is the same person. Two later diplomas mention unspecified crimes by Wulfgeat. One, to a historian's disappointment, believed his "machinations just not worth mentioning in detail",[790] but the other accused Wulfgeat of plotting with the king's enemies.[791] Both suggest, if read at face value, some sort of a trial Wulfgeat failed,[792] which is how he lost two estates in Wiltshire and Berkshire, totally assessed at 25 hides, that the king was now disposing of. None

783 …*infelice . dei omnipotentis ac totius populi inimico* (S 893 [998 AD]). On medieval royal ire more generally, see, e.g., Althof 1998.

784 …*beo he fah wiðð ðone cyng ⁊ wið ealle his freond* (II As 20:8, p. 162).

785 …*disposui . merito eum omni dignitate priuari . ut qui iniuste rapuit aliena . iuste amitteret propria* (S 893; translation from Smith 2012, p. 60).

786 *ASC*: 1006 AD (MSS C, D, E).

787 *Rex Ægelredus Wlfgeatum Leouece filium, quem pene omnibus plus dilexerat, propter iniusta iudicia et superba que gesserat opera, possessionibus omnique honore priuauit* (JW: *s.a.* 1006 AD).

788 S 861 (986 AD).

789 S 937 (990×1006, perhaps 999 AD).

790 …*machinationis* […] *qua modo non est dicendum per singula* (S 918 [1008 AD]). The document is spurious in received form but credited by Simon Keynes and later Susan Kelly after him (BACS VIII, p. 529) in regards of its narrative.

791 …*in inimicis regis se in insidiis socium applicavit* (S 934 [1015 AD]).

792 …*juste ab omni incusati sunt populo* ("...justly accused [with his wife] by all the people") and *in facinore inficiendi etiam legis satisfactione defecit* ("...tainted by crime, he failed to satisfy the law"), accordingly.

mentions abuse of judgement,[793] and of course, a possibility remains that we are dealing with homonymous persons.[794] But on balance, Wulfgeat's downfall aligns well with other similar stories and the Andover laws, and of special note is how Wulfgeat went being from a "beloved" *thegn* became to one of the king's enemies.

There also are examples of brokering king's friendship as part of pardon on an individual basis. The same diploma that calls Wulfgeat a "beloved" *thegn* of the king narrates how around 999 AD, King Æthelred restored a parcel of land *ad Pyrian* (? Wood- or Waterperry, Oxon.) to Abingdon which he had previously received from one Æthelweard to obtain the king's favour (*pro mea donauit amicitia*) after committing a non-specified crime together with his brother against the king and incurring the king's hostility (*meam inimicitiam exigentibus suis reatibus incurrerint*).[795] Two further specimens are the turns of fortune of Earl Godwine's family and how they are reported in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. After falling out with the king, Godwine's eldest son, Sweyn (= ON Sveinn, *c.* 1020–1052), returned to the country and asked his maternal cousin Beorn (= ON Bjǫrn; d. 1049) to 'go with him to the king at Sandwich in order that he might help him regain the king's friendship'.[796] Three years later, after a major conflict with Earl Godwine and his sons, King Edward had to concede to their return, and in the highly illustrative words of the Peterborough chronicler,

> [...] the king granted the earl and his children his full friendship and full status as an earl, and all that he had had. And all the men who were with him were treated likewise.[797]

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Thus, legal non-Wulfstanian *thegnship* essentially comes close to the purely literary *thegnship* of *Genesis B*. It signifies the achieved status and condition of an inferior party in a contractual (though hardly formally codified or written down anywhere in full), personal, *quid pro quo* relationship between a subordinate and a principal. This relationship falls neatly in historical concept and phenomenon of lordship, in this case royal.

3.4.2 "No Earthly King Can Live Kingly Unless He Has Thegns*": Royal* Thegnship *and Royal Lordship*

3.4.2.1 entering king's service

It is not known for sure if entering royal lordship was initiated by an oath of allegiance, in other words, if there was a formal procedure of homage. It is not improbable. A template of a (generic?) commendation oath has survived and has entered modern literature under the provisional name *Swerian*. Various individual facets of contractual reciprocal bonds arising from such commendation have left an imprint in royal legislation, but they concern lords other than kings and their men.[798] Nonetheless, the Cerdicings, too, widely used

793 S 918 accuses Wulfgeat of coming into his possessions unjustly (LAT. *injuste*; the rhetoric is the same as in S 893), but this has to do with him marrying a widow of a reeve who had unjustly acquired the same land from Abingdon in the first place – *nota bene* a highly partisan account.

794 Wulfgeat's identity and crimes have been studied by Keynes 1980, pp. 189, 192, 210–211.

795 S 937.

796 *…�sed Beorn þet þet he sceolde faran mid him to ðam cynge to Sandwic �sfylstan him to þæs cynges freondscipe* (*ASC*: 1046 AD [*recte* 1049; MS E]).

797 *…�sse cyng forgeaf þam eorle �shis bearnum his fulne freondscype �sfulne eorldom �sealle þet he ær ahte �sealle þam mannon þe him mide wæron* (*ASC*: 1052 AD [MS E]).

798 Baxter 2007, pp. 204–208.

oaths as a socio-political tool.[799] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that obtaining friendship, including that of kings, was sometimes confirmed by oath swearing.[800] Similarly, the same source mentions swearing oaths to a king and promises of faithfulness and submission from semi-independent rulers and non-sovereign individuals alike.[801] Perhaps, a hint at such an oath is the account of land forfeiture by one Ealdorman Wulfhere and his wife following him breaking an 'oath which he had sworn to the king [Alfred] and all his leading men'.[802] No details of the event are available, and it may well be that Wulfhere gave a general oath of allegiance rather than a personal pledge of loyalty.[803] Another potential reference to formal homage may be the annal for 1051 AD in the Worcester redaction of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which furthermore includes OE *þegn*. It uses an extremely rare OE verb *(ge)borgfæstan* which can mean either 'to bind (someone) to the allegiance of (someone else) by giving security' or 'to place (something) in pawn, sequestrate (something)'.[804] Perhaps, the king overrode the personal allegiance Earl Harold's followers owed the earl by coercing them to officially swear it to him instead. To all appearances, our sources do not contradict the supposition that some ceremony and symbolic utterance of words of fealty could have formally sealed one's *thegnship*.[805]

A case can be made that on the part of kings, the reciprocal response to solidify new commendation materialised itself in the form of symbolic grant of weapons. Presenting arms by a patron, often royal, to a follower is well-attested in the early Middle Ages.[806] In Old English heroic poetry, such a trope is also present,[807] though, of course, this genre draws on and describes an idealised (Tacitean) *comitatus*. However, in the late Anglo-Saxon period, an opposite custom has taken firm root, the *heriot* (above, p. 59). This tradition and the word to describe it were not unique to England. In later Germany, the same custom went under MHG *heer(ge)wäte*, *hergewede* or similar.[808] Historical literature calls its analogue in Normandy a "relief". It is natural to assume that these customs were in origin a return by a retainer of once bestowed weapons to a lord,[809] though later, perhaps, this connexion had diluted. These imposts display convergence in their concern to provide an actual stock of military armament, so on the practical level, they may have been intended to meet lords' material needs when outfitting troops. Nevertheless, such payments frequently included cash and precious objects, and Anglo-Saxon women paid *heriots* as well, and not always with weapons. Norman relief got increasingly commuted into monetary form and, especially later, was paid in respect of land more so than of persons involved.[810] It is

799 Molyneaux 2015, pp. 63–65; Lambert 2017, pp. 210–213; Hey 2017. An extensive study into Anglo-Saxon oaths more generally, also based on an earlier doctoral thesis, is by Ammon 2013.

800 *ASC*: 1014 and 1016 AD (MSS C, D, E), 1066 AD (MS D).

801 *ASC*: 918 AD (MSS B, C, D), 917 AD (*recte* 920; MS A), 946 (MSS A, B, C, D)/948 AD (MS E), 1049 and 1056 AD (MS C), 1063 AD (MS D).

802 *…iusiurandum quam regi et suis omnibus optimatibus iurauerat* (S 362 [901 AD]).

803 Discussed by Ammon 2013, p. 528.

804 DOE (*s.vv.* "ge-borg-fæstan" and "borg-fæstan") (also above, n. 497). The former reading that involves finding sureties was preferred by Stenton 1971, p. 564, but it looks forced and yields to an understanding "security" rather as pledge.

805 If the late West Saxon royal court in any way resembled the *comitatus* of heroic poetry, swearing oaths would have hardly exceeded social and cultural expectations of its members (Stratyner 1991, pp. 28–32).

806 Brooks 1978, p. 91. See further references in Ammon 2013, p. 520 (n. 25).

807 Brooks 1978, pp. 82, 91; Stratyner 1991, pp. 46–48; Härke 2002.

808 RLGA XIV, pp. 114–115 (*s.v.* "Heergewäte").

809 Härke 2002, p. 382; Baxter 2007, p. 205; Lavelle 2010, p. 114.

810 Hudson 1994, pp. 123–131 (esp. pp. 128–130).

conceivable that in England a similar conceptual conflation in *heriot* of acknowledgement of royal lordship and a succession tax had already been underway by the time when this rite was first codified by Wulfstan in King Cnut's laws. *Domesday Book* later coalesced the two payments – Norman tenurial relief and Anglo-Saxon personal *heriot* – and used corresponding terms (LAT. *relevium*, *relevatio*, *releva*, *herietum*, *harieta*, etc.) indiscriminately,[811] which is duly reflected in the Phillimore blanket translation "death-duty". Because at least some wills came along with royal confirmations,[812] it is permissible to suppose that handing larger *heriots* by the high-stationed was a public procedure and performed before an authoritative body of witnesses. At any rate, as evidenced by some wills and King Cnut's legislation, late Anglo-Saxon kings' *thegns* were expected to pay *heriots* and chances are that at the beginning of their service, they received some symbolic weapons as a token of *Königsnähe*. In CHAPTER 4, we shall meet a very similar episode in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, also reproduced in subsequent sources.

Scholars have proposed that this act was more than just a ritual but perhaps an investiture procedure.[813] Accordingly, weapons as high-status objects are supposed to have served as official credentials of sorts that symbolised official entitlement to power and authority. One piece of evidence is an odd phrase in a record of a land dispute in which King Edgar and his councillors

> [...] have declared all Ecgferth's property forfeit, by the sword that hung on his hip when he was drowned.[814]

What exactly the circumstances of Ecgferth's death were and why he was drowned is unknown. Agnes Robertson hypothesised that he was a royal official, and hence, one supposes, there was performed some ritualistic action or formula that involved a sword once handed to such a person. While this is a tempting reading, it is also admittedly tenuous. The other evidence is the description of Earl Godwine's reconciliation with the king in the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* ("The Life of King Edward"; book I, chap 4), in which process King Edward returned the earl his weapons. It has since been established to represent a classic example of a public ceremony of seeking royal pardon (LAT. *deditio*) through *proskynesis* (GR. προσκύνησις): a humbled prostration before a ruler.[815] Upon entering into King Edward's presence, the biographer writes, Earl Godwine

> [...] immediately c a s t a w a y h i s w e a p o n s and threw himself at his feet, and begged as a suppliant that in the name of Christ [...] that he would grant him permission to purge himself of the crime, with which he was charged, and bestow the peace of his favour on him when cleared. [my emphasis][816]

Later in the text, it becomes evident that the earl was not the only person to disarm himself only to have their weapons returned. While this theatrical act was no doubt symbolic, it

811 *DB* I, fols. 1b (KEN D17), 30c (SUR 1,8), 56c (BRK B10), 189a (CAM B13–14), 179a (HEF C9), 269d (CHS R1,40g), 280c (NTT S3), 336d (LIN S4–5), 376b (LIN CW9), 376b (LIN CW11); *DB* II, fols. 119a (NFK 1,70) and 445d (SUF 73,1).

812 E.g., pairs of S 939 (995×999 AD) and S 1501 (960×994 AD), S 906 (1004 AD) and S 1536 (before 1004 AD).

813 Banton 1981, p. 16.

814 *…habbað ætrecð Ecgferðe ealle his are . þurh þæt swyrd þe him on hype hangode þa he adranc* (S 1447 [950–968 AD], Rob 44).

815 Barrow 2007, pp. 127–150.

816 *…protinus a b i e c t i s a r m i s e i u s aduoluitur pedibus, orans suppliciter ut in Christi nomine* […] *annueret ut sibi liceret purgare se de obiecto crimine, et purgato pacem concederet gratię suę* (Barlow 1992, p. 42).

probably was an *ad hoc* part of a *deditio* and Godwine was likely given back his weapons more as the king's pardoned liegeman. If anything, the formal physical object that entitled a royal *thegn* to public authority could have been a sigilographic device. Four such specimens are presently known, two ivory and two bronze, all of compact, portable size and executed in a technique close to the one used by royal moneyers. One of such seals found in Wallingford (Berks.) reads SIGILLUM B GODÞINI MINISTRI ("seal of Godwine B[eatus?] *minister*") which makes it very plausibly such an authenticator.[817]

Weapons bestowed by the Cerdicing kings could thus have been tokens of depersonalised investiture or rather of personal status of a liegeman, or as a status symbol, they could have syncretised both. At any rate, chances are very high that people in the street encountered kings' *thegns* bearing arms. After all, OE *þegn* could be consistent with the sense "warrior", as demonstrated in §3.3.6. Beyond that, as expensive material objects, weapons in martialised societies surely enhanced social prestige of the bearers, an essential component for elites. Wulfstan's *Geþyncðu* suggests that items of military attire were perceived almost like a *thegn*'s uniform. Such perception is probably why Wulfstan insisted on insufficiency of mere possessing them and emphasised not only hereditary landed proprietorship but royal service as a component of a *thegn*'s status, too (above, §2.2.2.2, and below, §5.3.2). Wulfstan's rumination may have captured a social side-effect of cultural hegemony of royal *thegns*, on this reading, exercised through their visual assertion of an achieved elite status (above, p. 25) in "Greater" Wessex, but potentially less so in the Northern "Danelaw".

3.4.2.2 royal *thegnship* and "holding the rudder" of governance

Serving kings, it has been surmised above, had for a long time been a natural career path for aristocracy. It came with legal benefits. Some, or maybe even many, were probably so conventional that they required no written articulation. For this reason, an exhaustive outline of a royal *thegn*'s legal entitlements is hardly reconstructible. It is nevertheless necessary to give it some consideration in order to answer one of the research sub-questions of QUESTION 2 posed above, *viz*. *thegns*' embeddedness in power structures.

What we do know approaches a jigsaw puzzle with some pieces potentially missing. With due attention to these caveats, we nevertheless arrive at a generalised conclusion that kings strove to provide their *thegns* with an upper hand and protection before the law. In early Kent, personal swearing on an altar was enough to cleanse a king's *thegn*, while a *ceorl* had to seek three oath-helpers of the same status as him.[818] In early Wessex, a house of a king's *thegn* was protected by a 60-shilling fine, whereas breaking into a *gesīðcunde* person's house cost only 35, on condition that he had land at that.[819]

Other known legal conditions of royal service were of a dualistic nature. Its primary part were governmental obligations. But on the obverse, fulfilling them surely opened up channels to advance one's social and material conditions. The defeat of the "great heathen army" caused an emergence of a Anglo-Scandinavian contact zone. Here, an oath by King Alfred's *thegn* alongside oaths by eleven people of 'a lower order' (*læssa maga*, lit. of lesser power or virtue) was a necessary precondition to cleanse a 'lower-order' person from accusations of theft whenever the stolen goods (cattle?) were worth more than four *mancuses*

817 Keynes 1980, pp. 137–139; 1990, pp. 246–247. See also above, n. 410 and reference to Albert Fenton's doctoral thesis.
818 Wi 20–21, p. 14.
819 Ine 45, p. 108

(? 120 pence).[820] Failure to cleanse oneself from such accusations caused a compensation three times more than the value of the stolen. For perspective, in King Æthelstan's reign the prices for an ox, cow, pig, and sheep were set at 30 (or a *mancus*), 20, 10, and 5 pence, respectively.[821] It is easy to imagine how much the Saxons in this borderland must have valued predisposition of people under King Alfred's lordship and, consequently, could have used less scrupulous methods to secure it. On the other hand, accusations of killing required Alfred's *thegn* to find twelve of his peers for purgatory oaths.[822] This clause tells us, for one, that such homicidal cases were thought of as possible and, for the other, that late 9th-century kings' *thegns* had incentives to maintain good relationships in their circle. Imagining that this stipulation was intended by Alfred to solidify his own liegemen's solidarity will, perhaps, stretch the available evidence. But maybe it could have been a side product, and the idea is interesting to entertain anyway. The Alfred–Guthrum treaty will be brought into the discussion again in §3.4.4.6 below.

King Æthelstan, as was discussed above, expected his *thegns* to enforce his policies alongside royal reeves. One of these policies lay in the judicial sphere and, as can be read above, *thegns* were authorised to act as justices in the court of law. His legal advisors also recorded his *thegns*' authority to provide three-day respite for fleeing thieves. This put them on the same footing as bishops, ealdormen, abbots, and some undisclosed "noblemen" (LAT. *comites*).[823] Another application the king could find for his *thegns* was probably envoy service and representing the king's interests in localities. Asser, quoted above, mentions that King Alfred would dispatch *fideles suos* (lit. his loyal ones) to communicate with delinquent judges, and in diplomas, kings' *thegns* are sometime styled with LAT. *fidelis*. The composite statute of the London "peace guild" mentions that a legislative assembly at *Thundersfield* was attended by Ælfheah Stybb and Beorhtnoth, son of Odda, at 'the request of the king'.[824] The popularity of these names complicates identifying these individuals, but all three names appear in witness lists from this reign, and so it is probable that these two emissaries could be found among them. It is unclear, though, if this was a centrifugal or centripetal move on their part (below, §3.4.3.2). Simon Keynes allowed for both scenarios, either that they were local representatives summoned by King Æthelstan, or that the king directed them to a local meeting.[825] Either way, both fulfilled an intermediary role that is so common for elites (above, p. 25). Finally, through virtue of bestowing *Königsnähe* and in the spirit of

820 AGu 3, p. 126. On *mancus*, see Grierson, Blackburn, and Screen 2017, VIII, p. 366.

821 VI As 6:2, p. 176.

822 AGu 3, p. 126.

823 IV As 6:2, p. 172. What Old English word hid behind LAT. *comes* in this clause is obscure. Asser (above, n. 768) and IV Atr 8, p. 236, provide similar nomenclatures of bishops, *comites*, *nobilissimi*, ealdormen (LAT. *aldermani*), and reeves (LAT. *praepositi*). Banton 1981, pp. 9–10, suggested that underlying LAT. *comes* in the latter fragment was OE *eorl*. This explanation does not address, though, if the same was true for Asser and, especially, IV As 6:2 (which, considering the date, is almost certainly excluded) and, moreover, departs from outdated attributing King Æthelred's "fourth" code to Cnut (above, n. 758). On all other occasions of Anglo-Saxon legislation preserved only in Latin translations, LAT. *comes* is an analogue to one of the possible lexemes for an aristocratic status in the "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formula (III As Prologue, 6, p. 170; IV As 3, 6, pp. 171–172; III Em 7:2, p. 191). The Old English fragment of IV As 6:2, p. 171, names only ealdormen, abbots, and *thegns*. Perhaps, the insertion of LAT. *comes* followed the insecurity on the part of the translator regarding the optimal equivalent to OE *ealdormann*. But uncertainty remains, then, whether (s)he added bishop on the list (by analogy with abbot) or if the Old English writer omitted it. Another speculation may be that LAT. *comes* served as an umbrella term for a king's secular official, and thus ealdormen, reeves, and *thegns* were an elaboration on it.

824 *…Ælfeah Stybb ⁊ Brihtnoð Oddan sunu coman togeanes þam gemote þæs cinges worde* (VI As 10, p. 181).

825 Keynes 1990, p. 240.

the Benedictine reform, King Edgar expected his *thegns* to share his princely concern for his people's spiritual salvation by ensuring proper priestly pastoral care.[826]

It is hard to know how much weight can be placed on regularly repeated documentary formulae about councillors' consent and licence secured by kings when making decisions. It is acceptable to read them not as permissions in the strict legal sense but rather as symbolic non-resistance or even acquiescence. A similar contemporaneous ideology of 'a rule based on a fruitful cooperation between the king and his magnates'[827] passed on the Continent under LAT. *consensus fidelium* (lit. consensus of the faithful ones).[828] Even on the latter interpretation, *thegns* were invited to approve of royal policies, at least formally.[829] It is tempting to allow that when Wulfstan defined a top group of (West Saxon) 'thegns who stand in immediate relation to' kings, he meant magnates who held no ealdormanic tenures but frequented the court and witnessed royal documents. Perhaps, in light of the inquiry in centrifugality and centripetality in §3.4.3.2, this applied specifically those among kings' liegemen that could show up in royal presence more than just on a local level. Sadly, no solid way of proving or refuting such an interpretation is available. There is some indication that kings' *thegns* could have been among the collective adjudicators on occasion of a plea brought before the king. King Edgar, one Rochester document reports, held an assembly of his *ðeningmenn* (lit. servants = *thegns*?)[830] in London. At this meeting, the top ecclesiastic and secular leadership together with 'many of the king's councillors' (*fela cynges witena*) passed a decision regarding one Kentish estate.[831] By partaking in matters of government, *thegns* seem to fulfil the practical criteria of elite (above, §1.6.1.1), rather well. Even if some kings' *thegns* of the late Anglo-Saxon period never turned authority entrusted to them to their own advantage and stayed stoically immune to corruption, the act of partaking in running the kingdom must have endowed them with a great deal of prestige, an important component of an elite status.

3.4.2.3 "a box of chocolates" and the dangers of *thegnship*

This status, however, came at cost. Serving the supreme lord in the land conferred prospects but also exposed the person to the monarch's self-will, change of heart, or just taking advantage of. A *thegn* could not always know what he was going to get, and this fact may have not been previously systematically researched to a full extent.

The price of access to office of power has been made apparent in the already mentioned 120-shilling fine as a disciplinary means. It was meted out not only for abuse of the said office but other offences too. In King Æthelred's Bath law-code (1009 AD) Archbishop Wulfstan sought to penalise fast-breakers according to their status: a bondsperson underwent

826 IV Eg 1:8, p. 208.
827 Hermanson 2011, p. 66.
828 See the fundamental study by Hannig 1982.
829 For instance, in King Æthelred's mid-reign, probably as part of a new ideology of repentance for digressions in his youth, the king frequently mentioned his heed to the councillors and magnates: S 876 (993 AD), 880 and 881 (both from 994 AD), 891 (997 AD), 893, 894 (998 AD), 895 (998 AD), 896 (996 AD), 898, 899 (1000 AD), 909 (1004 AD), 911 and 913 (both from 1005 AD), 937, 942 (990 AD), 944 (990×992 AD).
830 The synonymity between the two in this fragment is suggested by their apparent synonymity in Ælfric's contemporaneous texts in which the Abbot expounds on one and the same idea (below, n. 846), as well as the apposition of king's *þenigmenn* to his *ealdormenn* in King Alfred's will (S 1507 [873×888 AD]; *SEHD* 11).
831 S 1457 (980×987 AD).

flogging, a commoner (OE *bōnda*)[832] paid 30 pence, but a king's *thegn* paid 120 shillings[833] – twenty times as much, if Wulfstan operated with West Saxon five-penny shillings. At some point, kings' reeves were liable to property confiscation for not upholding of King Edgar's command.[834] Because they often shared punishments with kings' *thegns*, it may be inferred that the latter could also be subject to confiscation. Royal diplomas supply evidence that kings sometimes seized secular property, with the most vivid case of forfeiture for unspecified crimes and then restitution being that of the *thegn* Wulfric Cufing in King Edgar's reign.[835] Wulfric succeeded in re-obtaining *Königsnähe*, but we cannot know if the king truly had any reason to strip him of it in the first place – it most likely was a move in a political confrontation with King Eadwig.[836] Even if not deprived of property for good, royal *thegns* could be commanded to give up their privileged titles to land and content themselves with a reduction to the status of ecclesiastical leaseholders, as it happened in Taunton (Soms.) when King Edgar granted this Somerset estate to Winchester (discussed below, pp. 195–196).

If we accept recurrent diplomatic formulae and the veracity of what they say at face value, kings' *thegns* were required and/or privileged to express consent or acclamation of royal decisions. But in practice, they might not have been always at liberty to speak their true mind. When insisting on his inheritance, in an appeal to his councillors for confirmation of earlier arrangements, King Alfred solemnly swore that he

> [...] would never bear a grudge against any of them on account of any conscientious expression of opinion.[837]

Not just acting, but even speaking against the king was considered treasonous, to judge from King Æthelred's promise to lay aside prosecution for such offences as a condition of his re-instatement to the throne.[838] Alliterative formulae in *Swerian* are fully concordant with this idea:

> I will [...] never, willingly and intentionally, in word or deed, do anything that is hateful to him [= the lord]. [my emphasis][839]

In a political system based on a reigning monarch, a *thegn*'s welfare intricately depended on political conjecture and monarchical discretion. If lucky, he could gain a lot, as did, for example, the brothers Leofstan and Leofric, sons of Goda, who appealed to King Eadwig and expropriated two Kentish estates from the king's own grandmother.[840] It is not impossible that this Goda is identical with Goda *optimas ministerque regalis* (lit. magnate and

832 Wulfstan's use of OE *bōnda* is discussed by Pons-Sanz 2007a, pp. 173–176.
833 VII Atr 2:4, p. 260. The Latin text of *Quadripartitus* uses *genetivus possessivus* and reads *tainus regis* but establishes the fine at 30 shillings, while the Old English version drops any genitival qualifiers but reads 120 shillings. Wormald 1999, p. 331 (n. 312) made a convincing case that as a *lectio difficilior* the figure of 120 shillings should be preferred.
834 IV Eg 1:5, p. 208.
835 S 687 (960 AD).
836 Lavelle 2011, pp. 36–37.
837 …*hyra næfre nænne ne oncuðe forþon þe hy on riht spræcon* (S 1507). An opinion to a similar effect was expressed by Stenton 1971, p. 553.
838 *ASC*: 1014 AD (MSS C, D, E).
839 …*ic wille* […] *næfre willes ne gewealdes, wordes ne weorces owiht don ðæs him ladre bið* (text and translation by Baxter 2007, p. 205).
840 S 1211 (*c.* 959 AD; *SEHD* 23).

royal *minister*) who sold some property in Sussex a few decades prior to the appeal,[841] or with the *minister* who witnessed a land lease in Kent about the same time.[842] One Leofric witnessed three diplomas by King Eadwig's as a *minister*,[843] and so could have been Leofstan's brother. Perhaps, in Wulfstan's terms in his *heriot* tariff, Leofstan and Leofric were 'thegns who stand in immediate relation to' the king, in other words, who literally enjoyed an immediate *Königsnähe*. But if not so lucky, a disgraced *thegn* could not just incur confiscation, as did Wulfric Cufing and the one-time owner of Bromley, Æthelsige, but even undergo physical mutilation, as it happened to one Ælfgar, who, in spite of his previous favour with the king and of being the son of an ealdorman, was blinded in 993 AD.[844]

Worst of all for people in royal service, unlike clients of other lords, kings' *thegns* had no higher arbitration if wronged by their master. An echo of the king's unchecked arbitrariness in treating his liegemen is heard in King Cnut's putative coronation charter (above, p. 59). From it can be inferred that before then, King Æthelred, or perhaps his predecessors on the throne as well, treated their liegemen rather heavy-handedly and thereby incited their resentment. It was only in the 11th century that attempts at binding kings' arbitrariness were undertaken in form of incentivising rulers to formally promise moderation in ruling their top subjects.[845]

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In summation, royal *thegnship* was a double-edged sword, maybe not unlike the one that could have been passed on to a *thegn* in confirmation of him being under royal lordship. *Königsnähe*, as in most monarchies, was both coveted but also dangerous. Royal *thegnship* brought prestige, authority, and material prospects. It built an individual into a governmental apparatus. It entered him the ranks of the decision makers. But it also made entrants dependant on royal favour and grace, and also subject to all the sorts of material liabilities that came with royal *thegnship*. No man rules alone, and in his comparison between the heavenly and worldly orders Ælfric perspicaciously noted that,

> [...] no earthly king can live kingly unless he has thegns and a retinue arranged as befits his kingship.[846]

What the Abbot chose to pass over in silence is that *thegnship* could also be both burdensome and unpredictable.

3.4.3 Kings' Thegns *in Anglo-Saxon Landscape*

The social geography of *thegnly* elites is among the sub-foci of research Question 2 of this study. In England, the wealth of textual geographic material in pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon charters and post-Conquest *Domesday Book* seemingly enables examination of the trends in how *thegns* were distributed across the country. This tempting invitation to find definitive

841 S 1206 (918×924 AD).
842 S 1288 (924, probably for 905 [or 920] AD).
843 S 606 (956 AD), 654 (958 AD), 658 (959 AD).
844 Keynes 1980, pp. 183–184, 186.
845 Molyneaux 2015, pp. 216–230.
846 *Ne mæg nán eorðlic cyning cynelic lybban. buton hé hæbbe ðegenas. ⁊ swa gelogodne hired swa his cynescipe gerísan mæge* (*CH* I.8App, p. 533 [ll. 3–4]). In fact, Ælfric repeats this idea in a slightly different wording in the Preface to his *Vitae*: *An woruld-cyninc hæfð fela þegna and mislice wicneras; he ne mæg beon wurðful cyninc buton he hæbbe þa gepincðe þe him gebyriað and swylce þening-men þe þeawfæstnysse him gebeodon* ('One earthly king has many noble servants and various stewards; he cannot be an honored king unless he has the dignities that are appropriate for him and such servants as may offer him obedience'; *LS* I, *Old English Preface*, chap 4 [ll. 1–5]).

patterns, however desirable, must be tempered on account of the peculiarities in the source material (see above, §3.2.1.1). Pre-Conquest charters are skewed in favour of "Greater" Wessex. With royal diplomas, the fullest data cover first of all the old core of West Saxon heartlands (Hampshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire – see Map 6) thanks to the domination of Abingdon and Winchester materials. Drawing conclusions about, for instance, a most tantalising problem of where kings granted land to their *thegns* from such incomplete data risks mixing causes and effects in observing obvious concentrations of royal grants only in particular regions. *Domesday Book*'s use of LAT. *tainus*, *te*(*i*)*gnus* and similar Latinisations was apparently informed by the organisation of Domesday Circuits more than actual texture of the social fabric (below, §3.4.5.3). For these and collateral reasons, any exhaustive study of *thegnly* geography will be flawed and unrepresentative.

The adjective "exhaustive" is important here. However skewed, the charters offer a continuous written record, which can be considered a luxury for the early Middle Ages and ought to be exploited. Even with these limitations, some data may be mined from these imperfect sources, 'if we approach them sensitively and imaginatively', to quote Tom Lambert on a similar matter,[847] and with constant reiteration that any such results will and must inevitably be subject to criticism.

3.4.3.1 "melting pot" or "confederacy of independent provinces"?

One problem that we may address – even with these imperfect raw data – is to use inductive reasoning to infer the geographical scope and composition of the cohorts of kings' *thegns*. With the "Aakjærian–Nielsenist" controversy across the North Sea, we may ask whether *thegns*' localisation was top-down or bottom-up in origin. To take the example of Ælfheah Stybb and Beorhtnoth, son of Odda, from King Æthelstan's *Thundersfield* law-code: the two likely served as London reeves;[848] but did they invade the local social landscape as a West Saxon superstructure and attend royal assemblies to report back on their appointments in Kent, or were they rather Kentish notables before they were kings' men and approached King Æthelstan as, so to speak, delegates of their local community? For the purposes of comparison with the Old Norse material, such stumbling blocks are not of abstract or idle interest, if we are to engage in the protracted debate of whether Danish and Västergötlandic *thegns* were agents of kings and whether their landed wealth was new or pre-existing.

From 871 to 1066 AD, some 543 royal diplomas (318 of them for laity) stand the test of authenticity or, at the very least, contain a core of authentic events. Of the same period, 215 non-royal items of comparable authenticity are available, which brings the total pool to 758. Of them, 79 were issued at known locations.[849] After extracting the data of these figures and relying on PASE for identifications of individuals, 478 *thegns*[850] with possible

847 Lambert 2017, p. 13.

848 Wareham 2023, p. 38.

849 Three charters were issued at locations that cannot be pinpointed on a map: S 915 (1007 AD), issued at *Beorchore*; S 1604 (932 AD), issued at Wellow (*æt Welowe*); S 225 (915 AD), issued at *Weardburg* (Mercia?). For a map of all locatable sites of royal assemblies of the period, see Map 2 (after Keynes 2013, pp. 140–157, with additions for the period before 900 AD not originally covered in the last-cited work).

850 Here, *thegns* were understood expansively. People whose titles differed from the standard *minister* (e.g., LAT. *f-/vassalus*, *discifer*, *homo*, *fidelis*, etc.) but were not of the highest tiers (such as LAT. *dux* or *princeps*) were included on the list. People who later in their careers got promoted to ealdormen were included. People who appeared on some witness lists without a formal title of *minister* but who are known to have borne it in other documents, were also included. Finally, people who bore no formal titles in witness lists that for some reasons omitted spelling out LAT. *minister*, were also included, as it is apparent that it is only a

geographical localisation emerge: we know either where their donated lands were situated, or where these men witnessed[851] royal diplomas. As regards the latter, a disclaimer is due. Given that merely 10.4% of the total number of documents in hand are localisable and that sometimes genuine witness lists may be attached to otherwise forgeries, it was decided to include documents of all types of authenticity when calculating *thegns* as witnesses. The assortment above yields 92 assemblies in 43 known locations across 16 shires (visualised on Map 9), and save rare exceptions documents issued at them feature witness lists with *thegns* on them. Their distributions, it must be emphasised once more, are far from uniform: half (45 assemblies at 22 locations) fall on the western third of the "Greater" Wessex: Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset, Devonshire. The eastern part south of the Thames (Kent, Sussex, Surrey) hosted only 14 assemblies at 6 locations. The numbers for the centre (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire,[852] Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire) and outlying Shropshire are 14 and 10, accordingly. Middlesex alone accommodated 15 assemblies at 2 places in very close proximity (London and Westminster), and Essex 2 at 1. Finally, one of King Æthelstan's assemblies uniquely took place in Nottingham.[853]

With these data in hand and its limitations in mind, the question posed above can be addressed using a few complementary metrics. Two *a priori* ideal-typical Weberian models of how the results may look on a map can be hypothesised:

1. England (or, safer to say, mostly "Greater" Wessex) as a "melting pot": *thegns* move freely and indiscriminately between locations; little or no pattern emerges;
2. England (see reservations in the preceding model) as a "confederacy of independent provinces": *thegns*' movements and holdings are confined to particular regions; the pattern is pronounced – a centre of gravity attracts the most individuals, and the farther from it, the more seldom an individual visits a locality.

Neither ideal-typical model definitively answers the question posed above and illustrated with Ælfheah Stybb and Beorhtnoth's possible identities. But the first model would be on balance more compatible with the view of kings' *thegns* as invaders in the local landscape, and the second one, accordingly, with the view of kings' *thegns* as locally entrenched elites.

The first quantitative approach is to analyse only the geography of witnessing (Table 3; Map 8). Here, the object of comparison was a historic shire, and the object of measurement was an individual *thegn*. Simply put, for every single *thegn* there was made a virtual map of places, grouped according to county boundaries, that he is known to have visited from documents of all types of authenticity. The number of visits to an individual location/shire was ignored. Eight western and central shires (Devonshire, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, plus outlying Shropshire) conform more to the second model, whereas five eastern (Sussex, Surrey, Kent, Middlesex, Essex) and outlying Nottinghamshire lean to the first. Some counties can be described by either

consequence of scribal conventions. But to count as a *thegn*, a witness to a document must stand the test of *Königsnähe*. In other words, unless an individual appeared in a royal diploma at least once, his *thegnly* identification was discarded.

851 In this instance, witnessing was understood expansively and included appearing among beneficiaries as well.

852 Because Buckinghamshire was visited by only one confirmed *minister* Æthelhelm who received here a grant in Wiltshire (?), to avoid distortions, as an outlier this county will be excluded from the ensuing analysis.

853 S 407 (934 AD; later copy with potential contamination).

model almost perfectly. For example, 70% of *thegns* who visited Wiltshire also visited shires that shared a border with it; 43% visited shires that shared borders with Wiltshire's neighbouring counties; and only 30% travelled (or came from) any further. Conversely, 71% of *thegns* who attended King Æthelstan's unique meeting in Nottingham also appeared south of the Thames and in Middlesex and Essex. Once again must be underlined the untenability of approaching these figures in absolute terms due to the shortcomings of the initial data. For instance, that 59% of *thegns* who appeared in Essex also resurface in Hampshire but not once in Oxfordshire, which is closer in terms of Euclidean distance, finds a simple explanation in the lack of known assemblies in Oxfordshire in the decades around the years of assemblies in Essex (931 and 940 AD, both in Colchester).[854] Similarly, that Shropshire *thegns* never made it outside is best explained by the semi-autonomous status of Western Mercia and their service to Ealdorman Æthelred and Æthelflæd "Lady of the Mercians". But even with the far from perfect departure points in the data, there emerges a pronounced division roughly along the line from the Wirral in the north-west to Lyminster in the south-east. This imaginary line probably marks two regions in respect of the elites because of how they were engaged by the Cerdicings and fleshed out in §§3.4.4.5–6. To put it simply and in general terms, west of this provisional line assemblies worked like gravity wells of sorts: the closer to one, the more likely that neighbouring elites would attend an assembly; east of the line, on the contrary, assemblies served more as attraction spots for a train of kings' followers from west of this suggested border. If this approach is at all serviceable, it points towards more of a centripetal motion, with a constantly ambulatory focal point: it seems that lay elites sought kings rather than the other way around, and that most visitors of royal assemblies in the end came from Western and Central Wessex.

A similar picture emerges when using another quantification and calculating numbers of *thegns* who neither ever left a shire nor are known to have received royal grants outside a given shire (Table 3; Map 9). The average and median percent of such homebound individuals accordingly reached 30% and 27% (almost 13 and 8 individuals, respectively).[855] Zooming in, we find four clusters. Sussex and Nottinghamshire form one extreme pole as none or just 8% of *thegns*, respectively, are unique to them. In both cases, it seems that attendees followed the king and came from Western and Central Wessex, as this is where they resurface on a large scale. Devonshire, Kent, and Surrey mark the opposite pole, because 32%, 43%, and 53% (accordingly) of *thegns* witnessing here are confined by their respective county boundaries, though the numbers for Kent should be treated with suspicion as prone to distortions (only 14 *thegns* for the whole county). These percentages make sense in the view of the third group of Somerset, Dorset, and Wiltshire of whose *thegns* only 12%, 14%, and 18% (accordingly) never left their shires. Devonshire's lowest position in the previous cluster is explained by the proximity to this third cluster: local *thegns* simply had shorter distances to travel when attending assemblies east of the county border. The fourth and final cluster comprises central shires (Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Gloucestershire; between 26% and 28% of stay-home local *thegns*) and Middlesex with Essex (20% and 21%, accordingly). The former four resemble Devonshire and are opportunely located within reach of both gravitation wells and attraction spots. The latter

854 S 412 and S 472, respectively.

855 To avoid distortions, as an outlier Sussex was excluded from the equation, because all of *thegns* who visited this country have been recorded elsewhere.

two, conversely, resemble Nottinghamshire. These numbers indicate a generally high level of geographical mobility, though it ought not be overestimated as this mobility also accounts for people moving between adjacent shires.

The third, supraregional, quantitative approach highlights this last-mentioned fact. Of the 478 localisable *thegns*, 167 were beneficiaries in royal diplomas and were chosen as the object of measurement (Appendix 4). Wherever possible, their estates were charted on a virtual map and grouped into nine compact areas that became the object of comparison:

1. Western "Greater" Wessex south of the Thames (Cornwall, Devonshire, Dorset, Somerset): 52 *thegns*;
2. Central "Greater" Wessex south of the Thames (Wiltshire, Hampshire, Berkshire): 88 *thegns*;
3. Eastern "Greater" Wessex south of the Thames (Surrey, Sussex Kent): 30 *thegns*;
4. Southern "Danish Mercia" (Middlesex, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire): 28 *thegns*;
5. "Greater" East Anglia (Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex): 12 *thegns*;
6. Northern "Danish Mercia" (Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland): 13 *thegns*;
7. Northern "English Mercia" (Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire): 9 *thegns*;
8. Southern "English Mercia" (Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire): 32 *thegns*;
9. (former) Kingdom of York (Yorkshire and Lancashire): 1 *thegn*.[856]

In performing this division, two hierarchical principles were pursued. One was to make note of Anglo-Saxon regionalisation itself, so that historically bound shires would be grouped together. The other was to make the areas of as much an equal size as possible without artificially tearing apart historical regions. Neither principle is admittedly followed perfectly here. Cambridgeshire, for instance, was equally connected to all shires around it, to judge from the *Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi* ("The Small Book of Bishop Æthelwold"), and the large estate of Wulfric *Spot* (d. 1002×1004) ignored the Staffordshire–Derbyshire border.[857] Any conscious gerrymandering was avoided at all costs, but its potential and unaccounted for agency could have crept into the ensuing analysis without premeditated deliberation. Area 9 by its very nature engulfs almost two times as many square kilometres as Northern "English Mercia", the smallest district of the nine. As in the case of Buckinghamshire in the first and second metrics, to prevent distortion in the end results Yorkshire had to be excluded upon completion, because only one *thegn*, Gunnarr, is known to have received land in this county.[858] The main analytical method in this approach was to gauge how localised these 167 *thegnly* landholders were, i.e. how much their estates and attested geography of attending assemblies crossed shire and regional borders.

About a half of these 167 could be categorised as entrenched locals, i.e. people with a visible land base in their respective regions, three quarters of whom (or 37.5% of the total), on average, are not known to have held land or travelled outside. Discrepancy occurs on

856 Because individuals can and often do appear in more than one shire, one ought not to straightforwardly sum up these numbers across the nine suggested regions, as the total would expectedly exceed 167.
857 S 1536.
858 S 716 (963 AD). On him, see below, p. 163.

account of Northern "English Mercia", where all 9 *thegns* are confined to this region but 6 of whom travelled south, and on account of 12 localisations of royal grants known from undisputedly spurious diplomas. The percentage of locals thus amasses to anywhere between 60.8% (maximal assessment, Northern "English Mercia" and spurious grants included) and 50.3% (conservative assessment, Northern "English Mercia" and spurious grants excluded). Central "Greater" Wessex south of the Thames seems to have been an intersection venue for many a *thegn*. Not only did half of all of them one way or another somehow found themselves here either as visitors, or local landholders, but even describing destinations of *thegns* with interests outside it resists any orderliness. It is worth re-emphasising that this is the region with the most extensive documentary coverage because of the exceptionally full archives in Winchester and Abingdon, so these numbers must be treated cautiously. Of note is how this distribution divides itself in two clusters. While in Southern "English Mercia", Northern "Danish Mercia", and south of the Thames the percentage of locals (conservative assessment) varies between 51% and 66% (and in Northern "English Mercia" it is 100%), Southern "Danish Mercia" and "Greater" East Anglia score just 44% and 36%, accordingly, and do not feature a single localisation off spurious grants only. The theoretical fallacy arising from too few individuals and consequently a too imprecise scale-division value for reliable geographical granulation, which could distort the distribution and explain the observed numbers, should be rejected. "Greater" East Anglia and Northern "Danish Mercia" on the one hand and Southern "Danish Mercia", Southern "English Mercia", and Eastern "Greater" Wessex south of the Thames on the other feature comparable numbers of *thegns* and yet yield various percentages.

If we now zoom out, the observed trends, as can be expected, lie somewhere in between the two proposed ideal-typical models. By and large, most kings' *thegns* operated on levels above their immediate shire yet still generally within a given province made of around three to six historical counties. Contrasting a socio-political scenario where a king tours around the country to visit sedentary elites to a scenario when highly mobile local elites seek a sedentary king is counterproductive. If the statistics from the potentially flawed but the only available corpus can be trusted at all, this was a two-way movement. The most reasonable interpretation would be that kings attracted first of all the top tiers of local magnates who could afford traveling to wherever the court assembled and/or building far-flung estates in which individual manors could serve as transition points en route there. In historical Wessex, where the Cerdicings gathered assemblies most often, wider echelons of lay elites had more opportunities to attend, whereas the farther from an area roughly between Oxford in the north, Woolmer in the east, and Exeter in the west, the more local assemblies were staffed with those few who accompanied the king.

3.4.3.2 centrifugal or centripetal?

Establishing these geographical models does not in itself yield an answer of whether kings and *thegns*' geographical relationships were centrifugal (i.e. *thegns* as appointees from the centre) or centripetal (i.e. *thegns* as local magnates in search of the king). The situation must surely have varied from region to region and from decade to decade.

The evidence is mostly indirect and too slim for any meaningful statistical analysis, yet still tilts the balance towards the latter scenario. Peter Sawyer meticulously investigated two groups of royal diplomas dealing with Derbyshire and Staffordshire (the Wye and

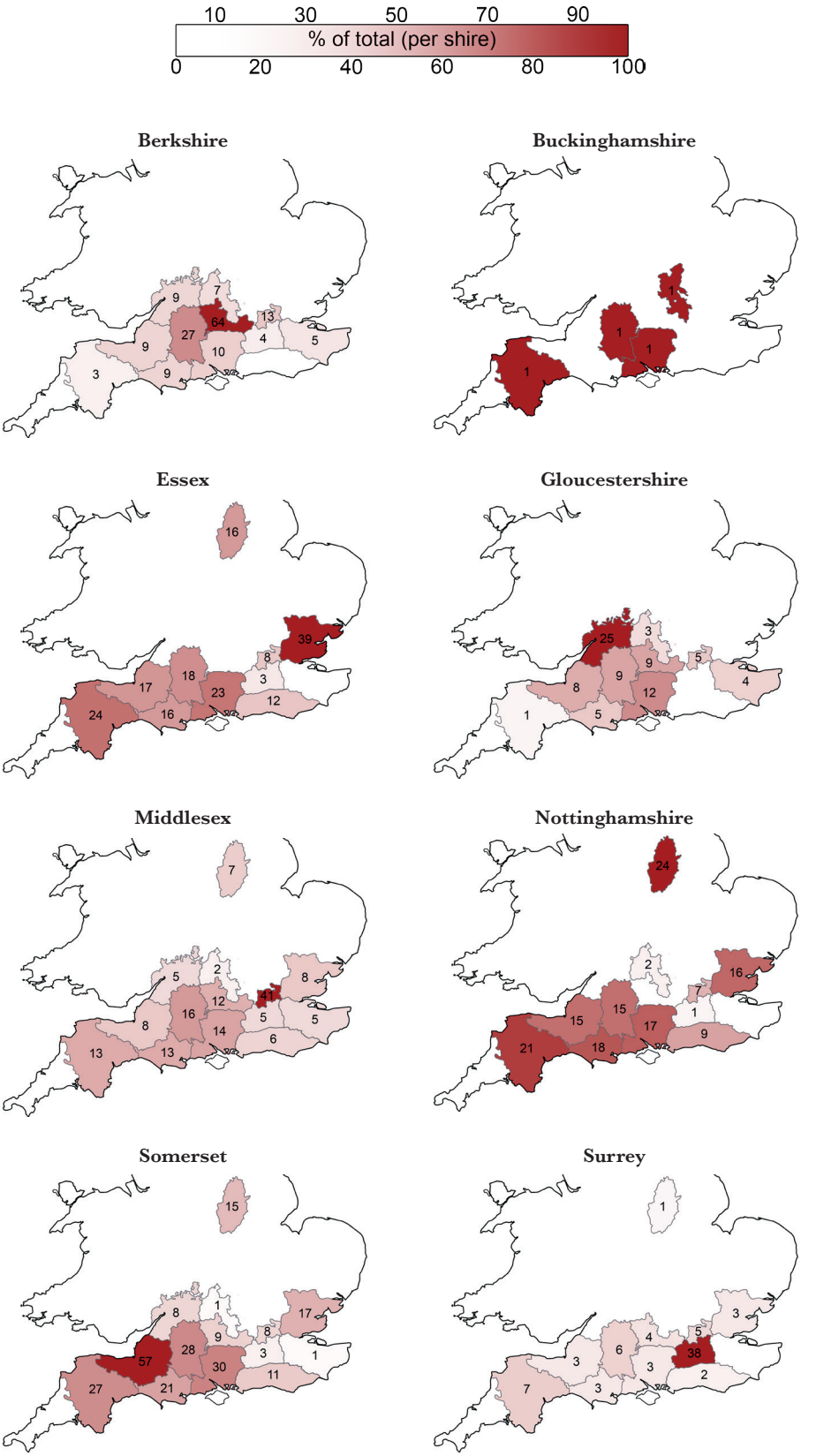
Hope valleys in the southern Peak District and with lands on either side of the Trent).[859] According to the testimony of one of them, one Uhtred was ordered by King Edward the Elder and Ealdorman Æthelred to buy 60 *hides* of land from the "pagans".[860] The death of the latter in 911 AD sets the *terminus ante quem* for this transaction. The name "Uhtred" was regularly recycled throughout the 10th and 11th centuries by the family of Bamburgh potentates, and it is probable that this Uhtred was among those who submitted to Edward in 920 AD. The exact same story is told in a confirmation of a similar purchase of five *hides* in Bedfordshire by one *minister* Ealdred.[861] Little is known about him, and in view of the provincial orientation of *thegns* elucidated above, it may be conjectured that he was a local from the South-Western "Danelaw". On the other hand, the name "Ealdred" circulated in the Bamburgh ruling house, so Ealdred from S 396 and Uhtred from S 397 could have been related.[862] Sawyer suggested that King Edward was laying the groundwork to his offensive inroads and relying on Uhtred in Derbyshire and Ealdred in Bedfordshire as his proxies on the threshold of the Cerdicings' takeover.

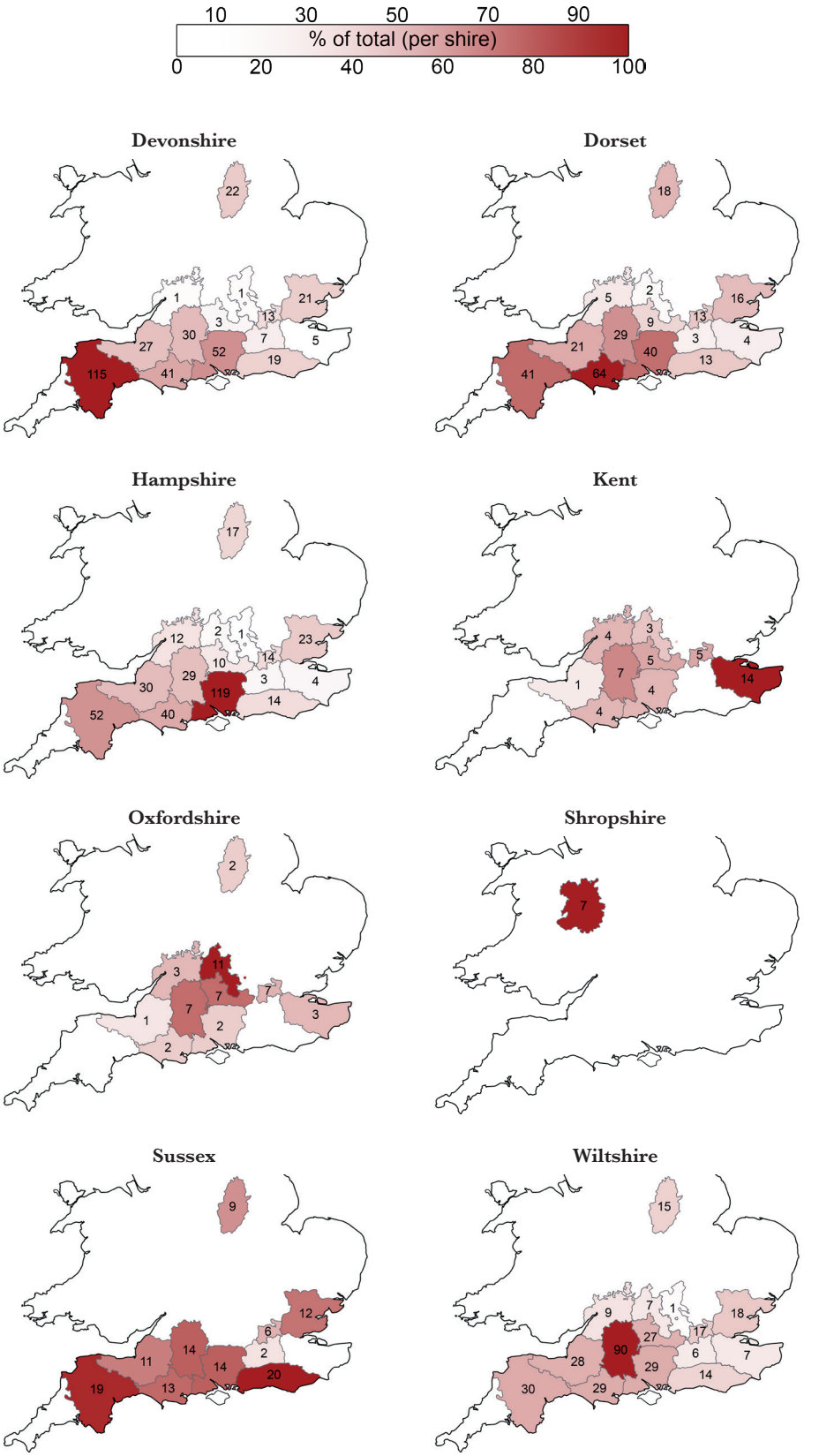
The same tactics, Sawyer argued, may have informed a series of King Edmund's diplomas for one Wulfsige *Maur*[*us*] in the same northern region (Derbyshire) a few decades later.[863] As epitomised by Sawyer,

> [...] the identifications of thegns in witness lists is necessarily an uncertain business...[864]

– and the name "Wulfsige" is rather popular in contemporaneous diplomas. What we can be sure of is Wulfsige *Maurus*'s connexion to the family of Wulfric *Spot*, whose estate was largely concentrated in Derbyshire and Staffordshire and whose maternal grandfather Wulfsige may have been. Wulfric himself was a frequent attendee of King Æthelred's assemblies in the south and a lot is known about his kindred and in-laws, who all were connected to the Central and Northern "Danelaw". Wulfric was a son of one Wulfrun – very likely the same woman who was captured at Tamworth (Staffs.) in a viking raid in 940 AD.[865] Wulfric's nephews-in-law were, in the words of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the "eldest *thegns*" of the "Seven (= Five) Boroughs", Sigefrith (= ON Sigfriðr/Sig[f]røðr) and Morcær (= ON Mǫrukári). Both witnessed royal diplomas though, sadly, at unknown locations; Morcær additionally obtained several Derbyshire estates from King Æthelred and after his demise his widow was rapidly married to the ætheling Edmund Ironside.[866] Wulfric's brother, Ælfhelm, was the ealdorman of (Southern) Northumbria from *c.* 994 to 1006 AD. These three male relatives of Wulfric were killed by Eadric *Streona* in 1006 and 1015 AD, Ælfhelm at the king's orders, his sons spared but blinded. But Ælfhelm's daughter and thus niece of Wulfric was none other than Ælfgifu of Northampton, King Cnut's first wife

859 Sawyer 1975.
860 *…a paganis emerat iubente Eadweardo rege necnon et dux Æðelredo* (S 397 [926 AD]).
861 S 396 (926 AD).
862 I owe this conjecture to Dr Ann Williams (personal communication, 2 October 2023; see further McGuigan 2018, pp. 132–150), though reservations may be raised on account of a far-off location of Ealdred's purchase from his homeland.
863 S 479, 484, 1606 (942 AD).
864 Sawyer 1975, p. 36.
865 *ASC*: 943 AD (MS D).
866 S 922 (1009 AD), 924 (1011 AD), 928 (1012 AD; authenticity disputed). If we allow a repetitive onomastic circulation in his family, it would be extremely tempting to derive him from the family of the Morcær *dux* who signed King Edgar's diploma for Bishop Oscytel (= ON Ásketill) of Dorchester (in office 949×950–971, from 956 AD also Archbishop of York) for an estate in Nottinghamshire (S 679 [958 AD]).


10 30 50 70 90
% of total (per shire)
0 20 40 60 80 100
Berkshire
9 7 64 13 27 4 5 9 10 3 9
Buckinghamshire
1 1 1
Essex
16 39 8 3 18 17 23 12 24 16
Gloucestershire
25 3 9 9 5 8 12 4 1 5
Middlesex
7 5 2 8 41 12 16 5 5 8 14 6 13 13
Nottinghamshire
24 2 16 15 15 1 17 9 21 18
Somerset
15 8 1 17 9 8 28 3 1 57 30 11 27 21
Surrey
1 3 4 6 5 38 3 3 2 7 3



Map 8. Geography of *ministri* as witnesses in Anglo-Saxon documents, 871–1066 AD. Colour density indicates proportionate percentages of *ministri* who witness in the incumbent shire and outside it

No. of same *ministri* witnessing in other shires (percentage indicated in parentheses)[867]																					
No. of assembly sites	*5*	1	4	1	4	1	3	4	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	4
No. of assemblies	*6*	Bucks.	Devon	Dorset	Essex	Glouc.	Hants.	Kent	Middx.	Notts.	Oxon.	Salop.	Soms.
Shire	Berks.	Bucks.	Devon	Dorset	Essex	Glouc.	Hants.	Kent	Middx.	Notts.	Oxon.	Salop.	Soms.
Same shire only; not received land outside[868]	18 (28%)	0 (0%)	37 (32%)	9 (14%)	8 (21%)	7 (28%)	31 (26%)	6 (43%)	12 (30.7%)	0 (0%)	7 (63%)	6 (85%)	7 (12%)
Adjoining shires	39 (61%)	0 (0%)	48 (42%)	54 (84%)	10 (26%)[869]	22 (88%)	53 (45%)	5 (36%)[871]	23 (56%)[873]	2 (8%)	8 (73%)	0 (0%)	41 (72%)
Neighbouring shires	16 (25%)	1 (100%)	59 (51%)	23 (36%)	12 (31%)[870]	12 (48%)	66 (55%)	5 (36%)[872]	18 (44%)	0 (0%)	3 (27%)	0 (0%)	34 (60%)
Shires two or more shires away	3 (5%)	1 (100%)	36 (31%)	26 (41%)	31 (79%)	6 (24%)	27 (23%)	7 (50%)	17 (41%)	17 (71%)	3 (27%)	0 (0%)	21 (37%)

867 Visualesd on Map 8
868 Visualised on Map 9.
869 Including Surrey.
870 Including Kent.
871 Including Middlesex.
872 Including Essex.
873 Including Kent and Sussex.

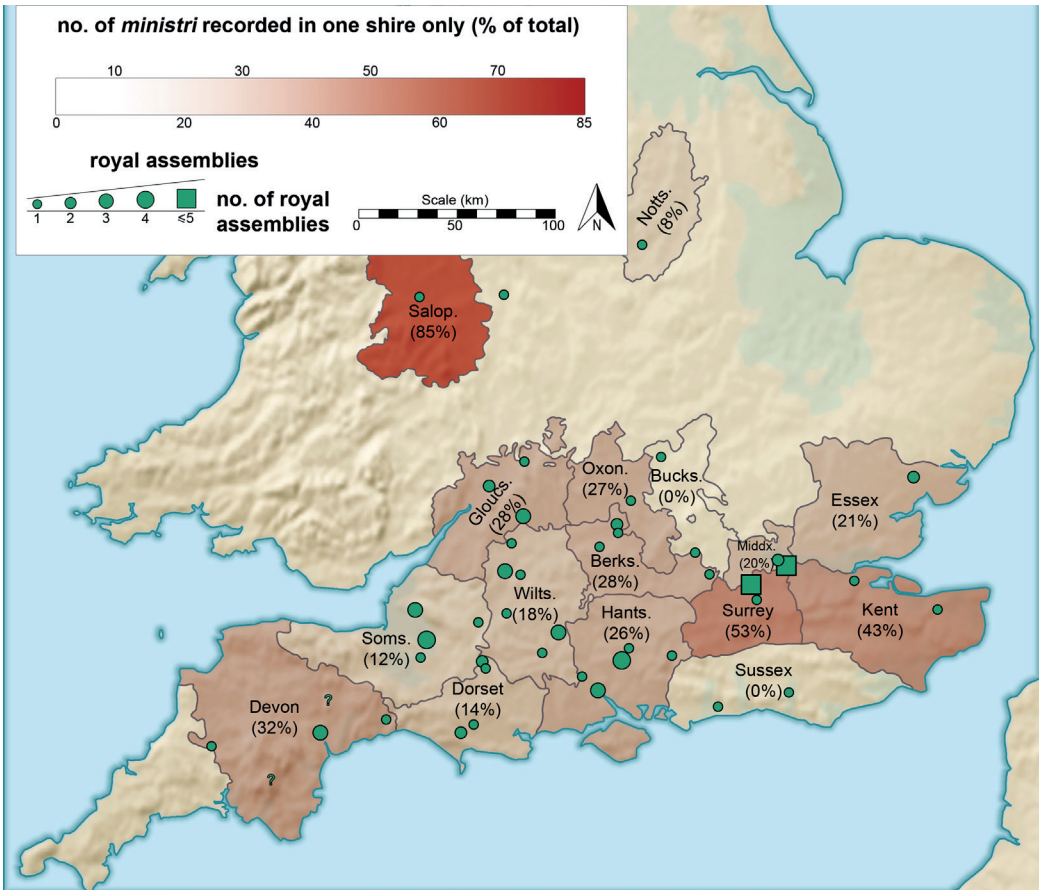
No. of assembly sites	No. of assemblies	Shire	No. of same *ministri* witnessing in other shires (percentage indicated in parentheses)[867]																**Same shire only; not received land outside**[868]	**Adjoining shires**	**Neighbouring shires**	**Shires two or more shires away**
			Berks.	Bucks.	Devon	Dorset	Essex	Glouc.	Hants.	Kent	Middx.	Notts.	Oxon.	Salop.	Soms.	Surrey	Sussex	Wilts.				
2	2	Surrey	4 (10.5%)	0 (0%)	7 (18%)	3 (8%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	5 (13%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	**38**	2 (5%)	6 (15.8%)	20 (53%)[874]	10 (26%)	6 (16%)	7 (18%)
2	2	Sussex	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	19 (95%)	13 (65%)	12 (60%)	0 (0%)	14 (70%)	0 (0%)	6 (30%)	9 (45%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (55%)	2 (10%)	**20**	14 (70%)	0 (0%)	14 (70%)	16 (80%)[875]	19 (95%)
6	10	Wilts.	27 (30%)	1 (1.1%)	30 (33%)	29 (34%)	18 (20%)	9 (10%)	29 (32%)	7 (7.8%)	17 (18.8%)	15 (16.6%)	7 (7.7%)	0 (0%)	28 (31%)	6 (6.6%)	14 (15.5%)	**90**	16 (18%)	63 (70%)	39 (39%)	27 (30%)
		Average[876]																	12.7 (30%)	30 (58%)	23.7 (42%)	17.6 (41%)
		Median[877]																	8 (27%)	23 (61%)	16 (43%)	18 (34%)

Table 3. Geography of *ministri* as witnesses in Anglo-Saxon documents, 871–1066 AD. The assembly at Penkridge (Staffs.) was omitted from the chart as S 667 (958 AD) contains no witness list. Numbers for the three rightmost columns are not straightforward summations of data for individual shires in the middle of the table and were instead calculated separately to prevent calculating same individuals more than once

(or concubine) with whom he had two sons – Sveinn and Harold Harefoot – who, accordingly, would in the 1030s rule Norway and England, albeit shortly. Finally, Wulfric's grandniece was probably another relative of Ælfgifu and wed to Earl Ælfgar (d. *c.* 1062) and thereby reinforced the ties between Wulfric's kin and the top Mercian families.[878] Returning to Wulfsige, at least one of diplomas in his name was issued in Gloucestershire.[879] In light of this geography and family biographies, Wulfsige probably was a native and eminent figure in North-Western Mercia. It is more plausible that he was invited to and co-opted at Winchcombe by King Edmund rather than he was the latter's plenipotentiary whose family aggrandised to an extent that later royalty and top power-holders sought alliance with them.

A similar co-optation must have underpinned the relationship between three successive kings – Eadred, Eadwig, and Edgar – and a prominent Northumbrian of a possible Scandinavian extraction, to judge by his Norse name Gunnarr. He first appears in the historical record in Abingdon in 950 AD witnessing a diploma as an *eorl* (*sic*).[880] Gunnarr bears the title of a *dux* throughout his subsequent career save one exception in 956 AD

874 Including Essex.
875 Including Essex.
876 Extrema (0% and 100%) excluded.
877 Extrema (0% and 100%) excluded.
878 Wulfric's biography and family have been most recently studied, among others, by Insley 2012. A demonstrative genealogical scheme is available in BACS II, p. xliii.
879 S 479, issued at *Wincelcumb*, i.e. Winchcombe (Glouc.).
880 S 552a (950 AD).



Map 9. Geography of local *ministri*, 871–1066 AD, a heatmap. Percentage in the brackets indicates proportional percentages of *ministri* who are not known to have held land in or visited outside of the incumbent shire

when he witnessed as a *minister* at Gloucester.[881] The last time he is known to have visited the court he was granted a large Yorkshire estate at Newbald (in East Riding) assessed at 30 *hides*.[882] Another expressive case of co-optation of Anglo-Scandinavians from the North are the Northumbrians Úlfr, his son Styrr, and Þórbrandr, entered into a densely packed with genealogical information anonymous post-Conquest text composed in Durham and provisionally called *De Obsessione Dunelmi* ("On the Siege of Durham"). The text locates all three in the complex web of intermarried Northumbrian landowning elite that included earls.[883] All three found their way south to the royal court and witnessed royal diplomas as *ministri*.[884] Styrr further comes up in another Durham text, *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* ("History of St Cuthbert"),[885] where in chap 29 he figures as a benefactor of the community of St Cuthbert. The passage states that Styrr procured some of land in question (Darlington) from

881 S 633 (956 AD).
882 S 716.
883 The original Latin text is published as no. 3 in the *Auctarium* in *SMOO* I, pp. 215–220, and a modern English translation was made available by Morris 1992, pp. 1–5. Morris also supplied his edition with a helpful genealogical diagram that connects all mentioned individuals. The latest in-depth study of this source, including a discussion on its date, that was available to me is the article by Lambert 2018a. I am most grateful to Dr Lambert for drawing my attention to this thought-provoking text.
884 S 877, 906, 922.
885 Published as no. 2 in the *Auctarium* in *SMOO* I, pp. 196–214.

his "lord King Æthelred" and had bought the other granted vills himself. David Woodman rightly observed that the whole record is somewhat reminiscent of royal diplomatic forms and therefore hypothesised that a diploma for Darlington in favour of must have underlain this account.[886] The syntax and the verb used to describe this transaction (*Ego Styr filius Ulfi, impetravi a domino meo Ethelredo rege, ut daret…*) may, however, suggest another reading: "I Stryrr, son of Úlfr, obtained from my lord King Æthelred that *he* (= the king) would give...".[887] In any case, important for us is that northerners Úlfr, Styrr, and Þórbrandr did bother to attend King Æthelred's council assemblies, and perhaps for a good reason: the latter two witnessed transactions in the North – the king's confirmation of Wulfric *Spot*'s will and grant to Morcær. We can thus be fairly sure that their presence and formal approval were essential for the viability of such dispositions. At least 23 individuals from a longer list of Kentishmen who between *c.* 960–1030 AD witnessed local land transactions in both royal diplomas and non-royal items. If, as suggested, a royal grant could not be enforced without local notables' cognisance, these Kentishemn must have put their signatures in the former documentary type precisely on the merit of their local relevance.[888]

The few examples of *thegns* owning land in both "Greater" Wessex and outside of it are harder to interpret definitively. A *minister* by the name Eadric obtained seven *hides* at *Hwituntune* (? Whittington, near Chesterfield, Derbys.) from King Æthelstan,[889] and his later acquisitions under King Edmund lay in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset, and Berkshire.[890] King Eadwig granted nine *hides* in Huntingdonshire[891] to one Wulfstan who otherwise received land in Berkshire[892] and witnessed diplomas issued in Hampshire, Somerset, and Wiltshire.[893] The same king granted land in Huntingdonshire[894] to his *thegn* Ælfwine who also held land from him in Berkshire[895] and attended his assembly in Wiltshire a year later.[896] The chronology of the former two cases may be read as indicative of similar co-optation: non-West Saxon magnates may have first submitted their local landed property to have it confirmed by a king's hand and were subsequently granted additional manors to materially support their visits deep in the West Saxon heartland. The situation with Ælfwine's possessions is ambiguous on account of the same year of donation. Simon Keynes, however, provisionally dated the documentary group to which Ælfwine's Huntingdonshire grant belongs to January 956 AD.[897] So, a small chance exists that his Berkshire estate was a later acquisition that would conform to the pattern. But just as probably these three individuals could have from the start been West Saxons dispatched by kings to provinces outside an immediate royal control and endowed with local lands to support their presence. On this scenario, Eadric's large estate in "Greater" Wessex could have been a reward for previous

886 Woodman 2015, pp. 50–51.
887 *SMOO* I, p. 212. See also Lewis and Short 1879, pp. 902–903 (*s.v.* "impĕtro Iβ").
888 A superb list of such local notables and study of the Kentish community were performed by Williams 2008, chap 3.
889 S 395 (925 AD).
890 S 467 (940 AD), 478 (941 AD), 490 (943 AD), 491 (943 AD), accordingly.
891 S 649 (957 AD).
892 S 769 (968 AD).
893 S 646 (957 AD), 779 (970 AD; problematic authenticity), 806.
894 S 595 (956 AD).
895 S 594 (956 AD).
896 S 646.
897 Keynes 1980, pp. 51, 62.

service purposefully postponed till the end of his career to not prematurely tempt him south and abandon his post.

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In summation, the dichotomy between centrifugal and centripetal types of relationships between late Anglo-Saxon kings and (their) *thegns* may in fact be only superficially irreconcilable. To take an extreme and deliberately fantastic turn of events, even if the Cerdicings somehow succeeded in utterly displacing all pre-existing provincial elites and in implanting their own appointees instead, in a matter of a few decades those would have inevitably grown into the local soil. A more realistic scenario allows for a complex and two-way interaction with a positive feedback loop and co-optation. In this setup, the king served as a constantly itinerant, mostly touring south of the Thames (see Map 2), attraction point for local elites. Attendant *thegns* took upon themselves one of the functions common to many elites, that is mediation between general populace and political leadership, and at the same time formed a natural hierarchy, envisaged in CHAPTER 1 (above, p. 25). Kings' top *thegns* followed them far and wide, while those of smaller calibre attended royal meetings mostly within shorter radii. Local notables were welcome guests when required to consent to kings' decisions with a bearing on their neighbourhoods. It is interesting to compare this largely 10th-century continuous situation with the snapshot at the time just before the Norman Conquest captured in *Domesday Book*. Stephen Baxter and Chris Lewis mapped the properties of two groups of the English landholders: those with more than £40 of income and those in the range of £100–200. They found that these men's and women's estates tended to be scattered across more than two–three shires and very often they held at least some land in the zone where kings most often convened meetings.[898] It is tempting to entertain the possibility that the former group of top *ministri* corresponded to the 'thegns who stand in immediate relation to' the king, and that the second, broader group of *ministri* to the 'ordinary thegns' in Wulfstan's gradation of *heriots*. Tellingly, Wulfstan contextually conceived of the two groups as West Saxon, for further down the list he introduced the king's Mercian and East Anglian and in the next clause "Danish" *thegns*. It must, of course, be acknowledged that there is no way of confirming or refuting this interpretation. However, nothing in the available evidence directly contradicts it either and appears less forced than interpreting Wulfstan's 'ordinary thegns' as a broad and unified social category of generic middling landed proprietors (above, p. 60).

Finally, perhaps it is the above-mentioned mediation between the court and locality that led to OE *þegn*'s occasional use as an occupational status. §§3.4.4.5–6 argue below that the Cerdicings conceptualised co-opting local elites in available and familiar to them traditional West Saxon social schematics, with the king as its centrepiece. This is where, one could argue, the perception of same individuals by the king and their social environments matched. It may be why some of his fellow-Kentishmen knew one Lyfing as a local before all things ('of Malling'). But to others, including his own son Ealdred, he was a visitor to the court ('the *Thegn*') (above, p. 116). From such occupational by-name, one can deduce that such visitors were not too wide a category. If, for the sake of the argument explored below in §3.4.6, one assumes that pro-active engagement in royal business and an according discourse could translate to a master status, the locals who did not internalise a *thegnly* identity in this way certainly outnumbered those few who did.

898 Baxter and Lewis 2017.

3.4.4 Thegns *and Landed Proprietorship*

It follows from the previous section that late Anglo-Saxon *thegns*, at least those who were recognised as such by kings, were well-entrenched in the landscape. As in many an agricultural society, this inevitably entailed landed proprietorship on their part, which is one of the research sub-questions in Question 2 posed above. It will be the focus of the section below.

From documentary evidence it would follow that kings' *ministri* used to be among recipients of royal land grants since as early as the later decades of the 8th century. We can be positively certain of the frequent lexical equivalence between LAT. *minister* and OE *þegn* at least from the early 9th century. Accounting for Bede's use of LAT. *minister* and its reverse Alfredian translation as OE *þegn*, this lexical equation could have been established even long before the first extant grants. A note should be made of the fluidity in early Anglo-Saxon Latin titulary. To give but one example, LAT. *comites* can on some occasions occur as LAT. *ministri* and *duces* on others.[899] By the 990s, very probably under the influence of royal, and, potentially, to some degree ecclesiastical patronage (below, pp. 191–195), OE *þegn* widens its semantics to include the sense "aristocratic landed proprietor". This in turn, and in all likelihood, must have informed some of the lexical choice of at least some of the Domesday commissioners or their informants.

But is the end of the first millennium the time when this sense had already entrenched itself or is it only the beginning of this process? And was *thegnly* possession of land always incumbent upon royal service? Besides being an interesting question in and of itself, this matter also has a bearing on the Scandinavian *thegns*. For one, it has been suggested that in contemporaneous runic inscriptions, ON *þegn* signified prominent local landed proprietors.[900] For the other, skaldic verse mentions *thegns* in context of (ancestral) allods, the odal, that too presupposed landed proprietorship (below, §4.4.1).

Nuances of Anglo-Saxon *thegnly* landed proprietorship thus warrant a thorough investigation in order to contextualise potential Anglo-Saxon influence in Southern and Western Scandinavia, at least in regard to language of power.

3.4.4.1 Andover legislation: chronological and geographical aspects

A crucial testimony is the already cited Andover code of King Edgar. The challenge is that, first, the text is dated almost exactly halfway between other sources on *thegnly* landed proprietorship; second, that it simultaneously fits all of them; and third, that it uses the language of a very specific type of land tenure, *viz.* bookland. Bookland has already been mentioned above a number of times, and furthermore, this type of tenure may lie behind Wulfstan's words that "fully own land" was characteristic of *thegns*. As shall be expounded in §3.5.2, his texts should not be written off, but his interpretations deserve a re-evaluation. For these reasons, this chapter now turns to the important problematics of bookland.

899 The most in-depth study into the nomenclature of early Anglo-Saxon titles is arguably by Thacker 1981 with a summary of Henry Chadwick's earlier work. Mutually non-exclusive correspondence between LAT. *comes* and *minister* extends to as late as 1048 AD when King Edward granted *comes* Tofig, otherwise known as *minister* or sheriff, two *hides* at *Berghe* (S 1017, probably authentic). The last time a *minister* is called a *dux* without apparently holding any ealdormanic position is probably 995×999 AD: the last of *duces* on the witness list in S 1218 (authentic basis with possible interpolations), Wulfgeat, is not known to have held an office this high. The first time a *minister* endows the Church with land received from a king is arguably S 1182 (762 AD).

900 Jesch 1994, p. 299; 2013, pp. 89–92.

To set the scene, let us observe the methodological principle of a discriminant approach and attention to chronology (above, §1.7.2.2) and first consider the context in which *thegnly* landed possession gets mention, namely King Edgar's tithe regulations (above, p. 121). If read as evidence to the contrary of the desired, they must have been a reaction to the encroachment on revenues of parish minsters by lay magnates. A necessary precondition to tensions had to be a concurrence of old minsters, inherited from the pre-viking times, and new proprietary churches. Upon a closer look at the ecclesiastical landscape of late Anglo-Saxon England, such co-existence is pronounced first of all in the Southern "Danelaw". It is at present believed that though the viking incursions of the 9th century had severely hampered ecclesiastical frameworks in the overrun regions, local religious landscape in the following century was not a clean slate rid of previous structures. Evidently, parochial networks of the East Midlands and East Anglia were the ones with the least continuity. At the same time, though the two areas did not at all perfectly overlap, it was Eastern and South-Eastern England where the Normans found the highest density of local churches.[901] Julia Barrow maintains that

> [...] the survival of older churches did not mean that they did not change: they very often lost status, endowments, and parochial territory [...] probably the most significant force for change was the desire for smaller churches under proprietorial control shown by many, though not all, members of the landowning classes, leading to a loss in rank for many minsters. The emergence of new seigneurial parish churches in eastern England was the most significant change in ecclesiastical structures in the Danelaw. It gathered momentum relatively late in this period, in the second half of the tenth century, though the origins of the process are clearly visible earlier.[902]

As much as archaeology can help, to my knowledge, all of the excavated 10th-century small Anglo-Saxon local churches are sadly situated to the east of the Saxon-Danish border outlined in the Alfred–Guthrum treaty. And the evidence on 10th-century origins of the extant stone churches 'is much more fragile than has generally been realized'.[903] Nevertheless, excavated churches at Raunds (Northants.) and Goltho (Lincs.) closely resemble the description in the Andover law-code: a manorial prayer house, with a later addition of a graveyard. Another connexion of the Andover laws to the "Danelaw" is a unique case in *Domesday Book* of one Stori who 'on his land and in his' "soke" in Derbyshire, 'without anyone's permission' could 'make himself a church [...] and dispose of his tithe where he would'.[904]

Is it at possible to read the Andover tithe rules in this geographical context? Against it would speak Felix Liebermann's source-critical authority. He believed the Andover law-code to apply only to "Saxon" England.[905] His argument was of pure positivistic syntactical nature. The *Wihtbordesstan* edict acknowledges a (sadly unrecorded) local secular law 'among the Danes' (*mid Denum*), but 'among the English' (*mid Englum*) there shall prevail the additions that the king made to his predecessors' statutes 'for the benefit of the whole

901 Blair 2006, pp. 296, 419 (maps 35 and 50).
902 Barrow 2000, p. 169.
903 Blair 2006, p. 414.
904 *De Stori antecessore Walteru de Aincurt dicunt quod sine alicuis licentica potuit facere sibi ęcclesiam in sua terra ⁊ in sua soca . ⁊ suam decimam mittere qua uellet* (*DB* I, fol. 278d [DB B16]).
905 *Gesetze* III, p. 134.

nation' (*eallum leodscype to ðearfe*).[906] This exact phrase opens the Andover laws in two manuscripts[907] and could thus suggest a reduced area of application. But the situation may be more complicated than just that, as such limitation would contradict the appeal to 'the whole nation'. The aforementioned concession is highly suggestive, as it and its repetition further down the text[908] suggest that while the king acknowledged regional customs in the secular sphere, he still insisted that prosecution and prevention of cattle theft should be to one standard among 'the whole nation',[909] including the Britons. This limitation would also contradict the overtly all-inclusive language[910] of the ecclesiastical part of the code, and the same exhaustiveness in respect of tithe payments is characteristic of other pieces of royal legislation – both before[911] and after.[912] A complex yet not impossible way to harmonise these collisions is to allow for a rather intricate and interdependent legal logic in the two codes, apparently composed by one author, very possibly Bishop Æthelwold:[913]

1. the *ecclesiastical* part of the Andover laws (II Eg) was indeed intended for 'the whole nation', but
2. the *secular* part (III Eg) applied only in "Saxon" England,[914] yet
3. later, accounting for the misfortunes (plague) after the Andover promulgation to violating the rules in its *ecclesiastical* part on tithe payments,[915] the *Wihtbordesstan* edict reiterated the latter's universality,[916] plus
4. in the *secular* sphere it introduced common procedures among 'the whole nation' concerning suppressing theft, while simultaneously
5. acknowledging "Danish" England's otherwise *secular* legal autonomy.[917]

If that is indeed the case, then *eallum leodscype to ðearfe* might recur simply because of common textual authorship, and all contradictions are eliminated. The conclusion above that in the ecclesiastical part of the Andover code, the king and his advisors applied OE *þegn* to a broad social category of landlords as such, would then be plausible.

906 IV Eg 2a:1a, p. 210. Some of Andover laws indeed look like a development of earlier regulations: *cf.* pairs II Eg 3:1, p. 210, and I As 3, p. 146; V As 1:2–4, p. 168, and III Eg 3, pp. 200–202; VI As 1:1, p. 173, and III Eg 7:1, p. 204. Wormald 1999, pp. 126–128, further made a case that it might be a reference to another lost code promulgated by Edgar 'among the English' (*mid Anglum*).

907 II Eg Prologue, p. 194, in BL, MS Cotton Nero A i and BM, MS Harley 55.

908 IV Eg 12:1, p. 212.

909 The same sense invites itself in King Æthelred's later laws (II Atr 1, p. 220, and X Atr Prologue, p. 269), S 1457, and King Cnut's first letter (Cn 1020:8, pp. 273–274) – *cf.* I Cn Prologue, p. 278. In Ælfric's prose OE *eall lēodscipe* means simply "all people". Of course, such statements might equally turn out to be a mere rhetorical device or *koinos topos*.

910 E.g., it gets reinforcement in the insistent use of OE adjective/pronoun *ǣlc* (lit. each) throughout the text, including later retrospective additions by Archbishop Wulfstan (Wormald 1999, pp. 313–314).

911 I Em 2, p. 184.

912 IV Eg 1:4, pp. 206–208; VII Atr 4, p. 261; VIII Atr 7, p. 264–265. The same provision in a negative formulation is also repeated by Wulfstan in King Cnut's laws (I Cn 8:2, p. 292).

913 Lund 2023, pp. 57–59.

914 This is further suggested by, e.g., Wulfstan's recycling of III Eg 3, pp. 200–202, in II Cn 15:1, p. 318. He specifies that King Edgar's regulation applied in the "English law", whereas in in the "Danish law" the same transgression was exculpated by paying *lahslit* (above, p. 139, and below, n. 997).

915 IV Eg Prologue, p. 206.

916 Overtly in IV Eg 1:4 and 1:6, pp. 206–208.

917 These spheres – proper religious conduct and prosecution/prevention of theft – used to be among the foci of royal legislative concern since the 7th century as they directly touched upon the common good of communities (Lambert 2017, pp. 95–102, 216–224, 268–274).

The source-critical scrutiny above advances us one step ahead as it anchors the crucial evidence of *thegnly* landed proprietorship in geographical space and on chronological scale: by the 960s, king-oriented writers expressly verbally associated landholders on all territories under the Cerdicings' power with *thegns*, chances being that such association could have already been in (some) use in the mid-940s (above, pp. 134–135).

3.4.4.2 Andover legislation: the problem of multiple social readings

The next principal question must address the space of the social: namely whether King Edgar and his legal staff still had in mind a connexion between such landlords and the monarch. Put bluntly, are we still reading about people in royal employ, who are kings' commended persons before they are landed proprietors? Or is before us the chronologically first attestation of *thegns*' conspicuous social standing thanks to their conspicuous landed property, unconditioned by royal service?

The absence of *genetivus possessivus* before OE *þegn* in the clause under examination speaks for the latter reading. Moreover, though legal references to bookland are limited,[918] in them OE *bōcland* is otherwise verbally not associated with *thegns*.[919] Outside the Andover code, lawgivers speak of "someone"[920] or concrete criminals in possession of booklands.[921] A 10th-century law-like epistolary fragment, provisionally called *Ymb Æwbricas* ("On Adulterers"; appendix to the Alfred–Ine law-book?), casually refers to bookland as belonging to a king or "any man".[922] Earlier still, Archbishop Wulfred of Canterbury (in office 805–823), too, compared his bookland to booklands of "other men".[923] Continental stipulations, too, if they indeed inspired King Edgar's juridical "thinktank", seem to lack any limitations of similar division of tithes to kings' men only.[924] Also tellingly, whereas in the Andover code *geneāt*'s land is contrasted with *thegn*'s demesne, the preamble to the *Wihtbordesstan* edict apposes OE *geneātmann* to a generic OE *hlāford*.[925] This would probably

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918 Af 41 (could have been intended for the royal family, see Lavelle 2007, p. 77), p. 74; I Ew 2–2:1, p. 140; VI As 1:1, p. 173; II Eg 2, p. 196; I Atr 1:14, p. 218; II Cn 11 (repetition of II Eg 2), 13:1, 77:1, pp. 316, 364.

919 With the only exception of the *Rectitudines*, on which below, pp. 196–197.

9201 *…se mon se ðe bocland hæbbe* ('...a man who holds land by title-deed'; Af 41, p. 74); *men* […] *þe boclond hæbben* ('...men who hold land by title deed'; I Atr 1:14, p. 218)

921 *Se ðe útlages weorc gewyrce* […] *gyf he bócland habbe…* ('If anyone does the deed of an outlaw [...] if he has land held by title-deed...'; II Cn 13–13:1, p. 316); *…ðe man ðe fleo fram his hlaforde oððe fram his geferan for his yrhðe* […] *gyf he bocland hæbbe…* ('...the man who, through cowardice, deserts his lord or his comrades on an expedition [...] if he has land held by title-deed...'; II Cn 77–77:1, p. 364).

922 *…sie swa boclond swa folcland swa þer hit sie ge cyninges selfes ge ælces monnes* ('...whether it be bookland or folkland, whether of the king himself or of any man'; text by Flower 1937, p. 62; translation by Wormald 1999, p. 372).

923 *…ne nenges monnes boclond*, *oðerra monna boclondum*, and *oðrum monnum hiora* [*boclond*] (S 1622). This presently incomplete document (memorandum?) has been edited, translated, and discussed by Lowe 1999.

924 Blair 2006, p. 443 (nn. 70, 72).

925 OE *geneāt* and its derivatives occur only some 32 times in the corpus (Carlton 2019, p. 93). Besides the Andover text under discussion, OE compound *geneātland* exists merely in two mentions: S 877 and Rob App. I:5. The former yields no addition information. The latter is a post-Conquest survey of Lambourn (Berks.) and describes tithe payments from *geneātland*. A post-Conquest writ by King William I further seems to appose Kentish *geneātas* and sokemen (Bates, *RRAN* 226 [1077×1082/3, probably 1077×1080 AD]). The last-mentioned were another heterogenous peasant group, of which the most certain characteristic is that they were one of the least dependent agrarian stratum, and that their dependency resulted from a landlord's soke right (below, p. 177). The *Wihtbordesstan* edict also casts some light in its metaphoric comparison of God's wrath to a landlord's anger with his *geneātmann* who shirks paying his dues (*gafol*; IV Eg 1:1, p. 206). Whether *geneātland* is to be taken synonymously with lexemes such as OE *gafolland* and whether *geneātas* were a discrete social category, let alone a social group, will probably remain insoluble due to the paucity of mentions.

not be the first or last time OE *þegn* exhibits synonymity with OE *hlāford* and LAT. *dominus* – lexically or contextually. A collation between the Kentish address to King Æthelstan, Colyton ordinance, and Woodstock code (above, pp. 134–135) demonstrated this aptly: all three seemingly concern one and the same legal situation of a lord – variously described: LAT. *tainus*, *dominus*, *aliquis/omnis homo* and OE *hlāford* – as a surety for his men. King Æthelred's Bath law-code exists in two versions: Latin and Old English, – and both exhibit interchangeability between LAT. *dominus* and *tainus*, here contextualised as 'everyone who has a household' (LAT. *familia*) and OE *þegn* and *hēafodman*[926] (lit. headman, in this instance explained by Agnes Robertson as 'corresponding to the modern idea of employers').[927] The Herefordshire customs in *Domesday Book* – a 20- and 10-shilling fine for killing a king's and or a *thegn*'s man, accordingly[928] – recall the demand of the Andover code to confiscate property of a tithe non-payer, 'whether the man be under the lordship of the king or of a thegn'.[929] And the whole situation of a *thegn* constructing a place of worship on his land is rather reminiscent of, though not fully identical with, Ælfric's story of a pious Terracinese and St Benedict (above, p. 118).

But contrary to these arguments, the same *Wihtbordesstan* edict speaks only of king's *thegns*.[930] The omission of *genetivus possessivus* is not conclusive either. In the Andover regulation on bribery, a corrupt judge's *thegnship* in relation to the king gets no verbal mention, though it follows from contextualisation in other laws. In other legislation, it would seem, *genetivus possessivus* was also sometimes contextually absent.[931] In the Bath law-code, the vernacular version drops "king's", otherwise preserved in the Latin variant, possibly as tacitly assumed (above, n. 833). A similar case has been made in regards of kings' reeves above. Furthermore, shortly before the Andover promulgation, in 955 AD, King Eadred granted five *hides* at Alwalton (Northants.) to one Ælfsige Hunlafing. On this occasion, his chancery produced the second only known specimen of a trustworthy vernacular royal diploma, preserved in the Peterborough archive. A *minister* by the name Hunlaf witnessed one of King Æthelstan's diplomas.[932] If Agnes Robertson's identifications are correct,[933] the same Ælfsige was granted Ailsworth (Northants.), which on this reading then passed to his son Wulfstan,[934] and Haddon (Hunts.).[935] The existence of another contemporary Ælfsige, son of Beohrtsige, in the same geographical area and also connected to the same Wulfstan[936] impedes exact circumscribing of Ælfsige Hunlafing's landed possessions. But Ælfsige Hunlafing and his father's factual royal service is unquestionable. And yet, while

926 VII Atr 1:3, p. 260, VIIa Atr 5, p. 262. Equivalence between OE *þegn* and *hēafodman*, both as glosses to LAT. *primas*, once occurs elsewhere in the corpus (BM, MS 32, and BM, MS Additional 32246, p. 95 [l. 1718]).

927 Robertson 1925, p. 338.

928 *DB* I, fol. 179b (HEF A3). The king is to receive 100 shillings in forfeiture on top of the fine.

929 *…si hit cyninges man si hit þegnes* (II Eg 3:1, p. 210).

930 IV Eg 1:8, 2a, 13, pp. 208, 212.

931 In IV As 6:2, pp. 171, 172, royal service is suggested by the fact that *thegns* are charged with legal authority on a par with ealdormen and abbots. Similar argument may be advanced for III Atr 12, p. 230, that stipulated monetary security pledges (from the accused) for court cases brought in by the king's representative) twice as high as that by ealdorman (six halfmarks against twelve *ōran*) and four times higher (six *ōran*) than by "any *thegn*" (*æt ælcum þegene*).

932 S 417 (932 AD). A Hunlaf also signs S 401 (925 AD), but the document's authenticity is imperfect.

933 Robertson 1956, p. 312.

934 S 533 (948 AD), likely also mentioned in S 1377 (963×975, perhaps 971×975 AD; Rob 37).

935 S 556 (951 AD).

936 S 592 (956 AD) and S 1447. See further Susan Kelly's identifications in BACS XV, pp. 223–224.

the Peterborough text does expressly call the recipient a *thegn*, it provides no genitival qualifiers.[937]

The evidence is thus conflicting. To progress in answering the sociological question of the current section, it is worthwhile to appreciate the symbols and concepts that, within the semiotic triangle (above, p. 32), connect to the historical referent studied so far.

Vignette 3. The Bookland "Bermuda Triangle"[938]

The Anglo-Saxon legal category of bookland, 'one of the most fearsome devices on the Anglo-Saxonist's workbench',[939] despite the word's limited presence in the corpus,[940] has long been in spotlight of historians' attention, on the modern level since at least John Kemble's *The Saxons in England* (1849).[941] Discussions often contrast(ed) bookland to other types of Anglo-Saxon landed property: temporary tenures (OE *lǣnland*, lit. loanland) and all other customary holdings, folkland. Researchers agree that bookland initially used to be a privileged category of specifically ecclesiastical land appropriated by religious communities through royal donations and reinforced by a written statement – hence the name and designation of this tenure as *jus ecclesiasticum* in some early diplomas.[942] Before the conversion, the argument goes, the only transfer of landed property among the Anglo-Saxons had been possible by fixed (unrecorded) family rules, which impeded endowment of the newly introduced Church. The juridical nature of the privilege, therefore, consisted of the (theoretical) immunity of the donated land to familial claims: lands held under popular custom were bound to constant redistributions and partitions in every generation, from which "booked" lands were exempt.[943] The economic nature of the privilege, at least in the early period, must have consisted of the rights to fiscal (OE *feorm*, *gafol*) and judicial (OE *wītu*) revenues that otherwise were a regal prerogative. These peculiarities must have set booklands so far apart from all other lands that some of them got enshrined in toponymics.[944] Expectedly, from early on bookland posed great temptation to laity as well, who previously had access only to loanland as a form of material reward beside their familial holdings. Bede in his letter to Ecgberht (734 AD) complained about how laypeople, under

937 [*P*]*et mæg to soðe seggan ðes þegn Ælfsige Hunlafing…* ('The truth of this can be acknowledged by the thegn Ælfsige Hunlafing...'; S 566). It bears no relevance if the diploma was a translation of a Latin text (so that, perhaps, this phrase rendered LAT. *hoc potest veraciter miles iste* [name], as in S 556 and S 557) or was drafted in Old English from the start (see discussion in BACS XV, pp. 227–233).

938 Many of the points in this vignette concur and sometimes repeat the inferences, arguments, and source treatment presented in an article by Blair 2020, which appeared in preprint while this book was still in production. Dr Blair's work, in my humble opinion, is a milestone in bookland (and, by extension, folkland) studies. Modestly, though, most of the conclusions below are my own: Dr Blair and I were drafting our texts in parallel without cognisance, let alone consulting of each other's work. I had previously expressed an assessment in Sukhino-Khomenko 2022, pp. 183–220, – rather convergent with Dr Blair's view, – of the geographical spread of royal diplomas and associated with it practice of "booking" lands, yet we reasoned to this effect from different premises. I am extremely thankful to Jake Stattel who pointed Dr Blair's article to me, as it confirmed the validity of some of my reservations about the received wisdoms concerning bookland (some of which I and Dr Timofey Guimon are guilty of reiterating (Sukhino-Khomenko and Guimon 2022, pp. 104–120).

939 Wormald 2001, pp. 264–265. In the unfinished second volume of his *opus magnum* (Wormald 2014, p. 212) the metaphor took the form of 'one of the most hideously rusty and toothy saws in the Anglo-Saxonist's woodshed'.

940 Ca. 50 occurrences, according to the estimates in DOE (s.v. "bōc-land"), including place names in boundaries.

941 A good exposition not included in my and Dr Guimon's overview is by Hudson 2012, pp. 94–115. Among other merits it recognises the many uncertainties about Anglo-Saxon land tenure praxes.

942 First unquestionable record is S 108 (775×777 AD).

943 A similar situation centuries later has been suggested for Scandinavia after Christianisation, when the main challenge to the ecclesiastical endowment was the secular familial right to land inheritance. On the Swedish example, see Runer 2012 (esp. pp. 604–612, with references to continental *calumniae*); a similar Danish case is discussed by Hybel 2018, pp. 200–206.

944 Rumble 1987.

pretence of endowing the Church (see above, n. 407), obtained royal diplomas (LAT. *edicti*) for lands for personal use. Consequently, on the eve of the "first Viking Age" the Church lost its monopoly on bookland. This concession was achieved by laying "common burdens" (LAT. *trinoda necessitas*, lit. threefold need) – military service, garrison service, repairing roads/bridges and/or fortifications – on all bookland-holders, ecclesiastical and lay.[945]

Patrick Wormald famously argued that for the laity the whole point of acquiring a royal diploma was to exempt land from fettering claims by kindred and at deathbed to contravene the restrictive custom. What had started as a way to break free from constraints of traditional heirdom in the course of time in essence became a hereditary type of landed property.[946] When exactly this conceptual flip-over took place is hard to pinpoint. The first reliable outright indication of "booked" land's hereditary quality comes from 779 AD,[947] long after laity became a beneficiary in royal donations. When OE *bōcland* first appears in the corpus in the first third of the 9th century, it seems to have already developed the semantics of heritable land, to judge from Kentish documents associated with Archbishop Wulfred. Intriguingly, two contemporaneous Kentish bequests that obviously disposed of previously "booked" lands call their object of disposition OE *ierfe* (lit. [ancestral?] property).[948] That this practice of bequeathing "booked" lands continued in the 10th century is confirmed in at least 14 royal diplomas whose estates reappear in wills of the same beneficiaries.[949]

This elegant tripartite book-loan-folkland division commands a great explanatory force. But it also runs a risk of sometimes bringing too an extraneous orderliness to a less tidy historical fact. To start with is the trust one has to put into self-presentation of diplomas that occupy 'a dominant place in the pre-Conquest evidence of land tenure'.[950] It has for some time been acknowledged that 'Anglo-Saxon charters say both less and more than they mean'[951] and do 'not necessarily say what they meant'.[952] The privileges they so repetitively announce could be and frequently were overrun. "Booked" lands were liable to confiscations[953] or reshuffling.[954] From early on, the theoretical freedom of disposition in reality often relied on a royal sanction.[955] Older diplomas occasionally got annulled.[956] Even continuous ownership by one and the same individual could have sometimes required confirmation at a change of the figure on the throne, if that is how we are to interpret a few royal diplomas by successive kings for same estates for same beneficiaries.[957] The only known record of 'obligations of charter',[958] if it can at all be trusted, seems to not exempt the master of the land from other burdens on land (OE *landriht*).[959] Despite formal immunity to public renders besides the "common burdens", upon introduction in 1012 AD, their holders probably had to acquit their "booked" lands by paying a mercenary impost (OE *heregeld*).[960] On a solely lexical level, that OE *bōcland* was coined to describe the phenomenon of chartered land donated by a king to the Church is maintained on the evidence that OE *bōc* often meant a royal diploma. But this lexical sense of OE *bōcland* manifests itself only once[961] during a time and in the literary environment that (already?) used the

945 Abels 1988, pp. 149–159, though note various opinions above, n. 266.
946 Wormald 2006, pp. 154–157 (a reprint of an earlier 1984 Jarrow lecture); 2001; 2014, pp. 212–229.
947 S 114. The land was to stay in familial possession, even if an heir to the original grantee committed a crime.
948 S 41 (805×832 AD) and S 1500 (845×853 AD), S 296 (845 AD) and S 1510 (845×853 AD).
949 See Sukhino-Khomenko 2022, p. 201 (n. 73).
950 Baxter and Blair 2006, p. 21.
951 Wormald 2006, p. 154.
952 Blair 2020, p. 202. *Cf.* a similar opinion by Wickham 2005, pp. 316, 324–325.
953 Keynes 1980, p. 201 (n. 177).
954 Baxter and Blair 2006, p. 36. A case when an apparently bookland status was reduced to loanland is discussed below, pp. 195–196.
955 Ryan 2013; Sukhino-Khomenko and Guimon 2022, pp. 114–115.
956 S 395, 460 (940 AD), 469 (940 AD), 488 (943 AD), 496 (944 [? for 942 AD]), 856 (985 AD), 860 (985 AD), 861, 872 (988 AD), 876. This list may well be incomplete.
957 Lavelle 2010, p. 35.
958 OE *bōcriht*, a *hapax legomenon*, but clearly describing LAT. *trinoda necessitas*.
959 Rect 1–1:1, p. 444. See the discussion below, pp. 196–197.
960 Pratt 2018.
961 *OEHE*, book II, chap 2, p. 104; book III, chap 18, p. 236. Bede himself employed rather generic Latin expressions: *territoria*, *possessiones praediorum*, *possessiunculis terrarium* (*HE*, book II, chap 3, p. 142; book III, chap 24, pp. 290, 292). Charters, however, get no mention by him but are strongly contextually implied.

same lexeme in a general sense "hereditary property".[962] At least in later documentary genre OE *bōc* was not 'conventionally reserved for the royal diploma'[963] and just meant "a title-deed to land".[964]

Another problem is how bookland largely depends on antithetical folkland and loanland. The discussion of OE *folcland* has been particularly long because of its extremely scarce attestation, merely eight times in just five sources (one of which is poetic at that), all limited to Kent and Wessex before 950 AD at the latest. Recent arguments tilt the balance of evidence in favour of interpreting folkland as *de facto* kings' fiscal land,[965] rather than a blanket category of all non-"booked" lands held by (various) popular restrictive custom(s).[966] This very custom bookland was meant to circumvent is reconstructed mostly retrospectively. To postulate land's inalienability outside early Anglo-Saxon kin-groups one has to read dispositive formulae in charters as introducing something radically innovative rather than simply confirming pre-existing arrangements. Some doubts on the matter have been lately entering the scholarship, inasmuch as certain early diplomas could have actually played a part in grantees' strategies regarding aristocratic familial land already on hand.[967]

To make things even more complicated than they already are by calling upon the semiotic triangle (above, p. 32), the word OE *lǣnland* is even rarer than OE *bōcland* and, together with a metathetical OE expression *landes lǣn* (lit. land loan), is attested only six times.[968] As a phenomenon/referent rather than concept/reference, loanland demonstrates highly plastic features that obscure its rough-and-ready distinction from bookland, as, for example, suggested by the Old English Alfredian translation of St Augustine's *Soliloquies*.[969] On a lexical level, temporary grants could be "booked".[970] Practically, they

962 King Attalus III (*c.* 170 BC – 133 BC) bequests his kingdom to Rome as his bookland (*OEOr*, book V, chap 4:1, p. 314).

963 Kennedy 1985, p. 175 (n. 2).

964 Cases when OE *bōc* clearly referred to a lease agreement include but may not be limited to S 1281 and S 1405. See also DOE (s.v. "bōc 1D"). Notice must be taken of a highly variable Latin vocabulary in reference to what modern literature collectively calls "charters" and "diplomas". In the actual sources, a wide array of lexemes is used: *liber* (*hereditarius/ecclesiastici juris*), *libellus*, (*ruralis*) *c*(*h*)*arta/karta*, *c*(*h*)*artula/kartula*, *hereditaria karta*, *carta territorii*, *scriptura hereditatis*, *privilegium*, *inscriptio*, *brevicula*, *chirographum* (≺ GR. χειρόγραφον, lit. manuscript), *telligraph*(*i*)*um/telligraphus* (≺ LAT. *tellus* + GR. γράφειν, lit. to write), *syngrapha* (≺ GR. συγγραφή, lit. recording), and others.

965 Blair 2020, pp. 206–218. Categorisation of West Saxon royal lands was a feat of historical labour by Lavelle 2007. What principles applied outside Wessex is largely unknown.

966 Baxter 2007, p. 148, entertains the possibility that there could have in fact been two species of folkland, *viz.* land subject to hereditary custom and land held by king's functionaries *ex officio* from the estates allocated for "public" duties. With only seven meaningful mentions of OE *folcland* much remains a speculation. Blair, convincingly in my opinion, dispels any connexion of folkland and customary land by showing an exclusively royal literary context and physical landscape in which OE *folcland* has been recorded.

967 Blair 2020, p. 202. The earliest charters blessed with a minimal hope of authenticity were issued not only by sovereign rulers but (often with overlords' consent) by their underkings and people of undefined status: e.g., S 1165 (672×674 AD; by a *subregulus* of Surrey), 1167 (680 AD; title unknown), 1168 (? 681 AD; by a *subregulus*), 1169 (685 AD; by a *subregulus* or king), 1170 (688 AD; by a West Saxon governor?); 1171 (686×688 AD; by an East Saxon royalty), 1172 (692×709 AD; by a king's sister), 1173 (*c.* 700 ad; by a *dux*), 1176 (708 AD; title unknown), 1177 (704×709 AD; by rulers of Hwicce), 1179 (705×726 AD; by a *patricius*).

968 S 1347, 1367, S 1504 (946×947 AD; *SEHD* 20), endorsement to S 1280 (904 AD; Rob 19). MS 32 and BM, MS Additional 32246, p. 54 (l. 316–317); First Cleopatra Glossary, l. 432. Otherwise, in charters the phenomenon is variously described through verbs that mean "to lend, to let", such as OE (*ā*)*lǣnan,* (*ā*)*lendan*, (*ā*-/*tō*)*lætan,* or just as *lǣn*. How meaningful this lexical diffusion is, perhaps, better left for a separate study (*cf.* above, n. 964).

969 *…ælcne man lyst, siððan he ænig cotlyf on his hlafordes læne myd his fultume getimbred hæfð, þæt he hine mote hwilum þar-on gerestan, and huntigan, and fuglian, and fiscian, and his on gehwilce wisan to þere lænan tilian, ægþær ge on se ge on lande, oð þone fyrst þe he bocland and æce yrfe þurh his hlafordes miltse geearnige* ('...every man, when he has built a hamlet on land leased to him by his lord and with his lord's help, likes to stay there some time, and go hunting, fowling and fishing; and to employ himself in every way on that leased land, both on sea and land, until the time when he shall deserve bookland and a perpetual inheritance through his lord's kindness'; *OESol*, Preface, p. 48).

970 E.g., S 430, 467, 565, 1283, 1299 (962 AD; Rob 34), 1300, 1304, 1305, 1310, 1311, 1314, 1316, 1362 (990 AD; Rob 65), 1363 (990 AD; Rob 64), 1366, 1394, 1444 (879×908 AD), 1819.

could be bequeathed.[971] They were not always exempt from "common burdens".[972] They could be given as a customary "morning gift"[973] to a newly wedded wife.[974] What few royal leases survived took the lexical and material guise of regular royal diplomas (below, n. 1125). The right to heritable disposition of leased land frequently went under a classical bookland syndetic formula "to hold and give to whomever (s)he likes".[975] Finally, there has been reconstructed a whole separate category of Anglo-Saxon temporary tenure. Under Edward the Confessor (but almost certainly before, too), some 'kind of folkland, royal *lænland* [was] assigned to earls on an ex officio basis for the duration of their period in office'. In practice though, as it often happens, individual royal officials discriminated between their and the king's coffers less scrupulously than others and succeeded in privatising some of the lands set aside for official use.[976]

The only juridical aspect that seems to meaningfully distinguish loan- and bookland is the expected reversion to the lessor at the expiration of lease or on account of a lease-holder's crime. In the famous *Fonthill Letter* (examined in greater detail below, §3.4.4.6), all of Helmstan's *ierfe* got confiscated by a king's reeve, but his *lǣn* reverted to the owner, Ordlaf. King Cnut's later laws elucidate the same: booklands of the outlawed, regardless of their personal allegiance, will be the king's; property and land given to a deserter by his lord reverts to the lord, but, manuscript Cotton Nero A i adds, the deserter's bookland 'shall pass into the king's hands'.[977] Some pontifical lease contracts stipulate immunity to forfeiture among their conditions of tenure,[978] and so do two wills[979] and one spurious royal revisionary grant.[980] Two of these documents use the (alliterative in vernacular) formula "neither may lose in a lawsuit, nor forfeit".[981]

Nonetheless it is just as possible that this theoretical principle might have malfunctioned in practice. Ordlaf's lease to Helmstan took place in the actors' living memory, so Ordlaf had no trouble securing his right. The two wills just quoted, too, stipulated forfeit-free status of lands given for lifetime

971 E.g., S 1491, 1503 (1014 AD; *Wills* 20), 1504, 1521, 1532 (*c.* 1050 AD).

972 E.g., S 218 (883 AD; *SEHD* 12), 430, 467, 526, 565, 693, 1270, 1274, 1275, 1285, 1290 (957 AD), 1298 (962 AD), 1309 (966 AD; Rob 42), 1313 (967 AD), 1326 (969 AD; Rob 46), 1332 (977 AD; Rob 55), 1334, 1362, 1366, 1378 (995 AD), 1384 (1017 AD), 1385 (1003×1016 AD), 1393 (1038 AD), 1394, 1405, 1406 (1046×1057 AD; Rob 112). The discussion of whether all leases were governed by the same sets of principles, even when not clearly spelt out, or if, contrarily, only rules overtly written down applied in each one case, has not been fully resolved (Abels 1988, p. 152; King 1996, p. 115).

973 On this custom, see Cardwell 2020, pp. 93–94, who also provides references to place-name studies that suggest recordings of such grants have been engraved in landscape. The *Fonthill* letter, our fullest account of this custom, suggests that "morning gifts" used to be rather freely disposable and purchasable. S 939 mentions that a widow paid her "morning gift" as a fee for unobstructed inheritance. Freedom to bequeath "morning gifts" is revealed in S 1539 (900–1066 AD; *Wills* 3). Apparently, "morning gifts" reverted to the family of the donor only if upon his death his widow remarried too soon (II Cn 73a, p. 360).

974 No. 2 in Ker 1948, p. 74.

975 S 385, 467, 1303 (963 AD; Rob 35), 1326, 1362, 1366, 1394, 1444, 1459. This formula in vernacular appears in clearly bookland contexts in S 566, in endorsements to S 715 (963 AD) and S 898 (1001 AD), in a note to S 544 (949 AD), in the will S 1539, and in the incomplete S 1622. An embryo of this formula in vernacular is contained in S 204: 'to have and to give after his day to whoever has earned it from him by humble obedience' (above, p. 144). Blair 2020, p. 232, discusses other documents in which it occurs. Proliferation of this formula suggests that freedom of disposition was wider than the tripartite model seemingly grants. Curiously, the lessee in S 1303 prohibits his heirs to bequest outside the male line which closely resembles Af 41 and its handling of bookland.

976 Clarke 1994, chap 2; Baxter and Blair 2006, pp. 23–44 (quotation from p. 27), also integrated by Baxter 2007, pp. 125–151.

977 II Cn 13:1, 77–77:1, pp. 316, 364.

978 E.g., S 1224, 1299, 1305, 1310.

979 S 1528 (after 1020 AD; *Wills* 25) and S 1536 (1002×1004 AD; *Wills* 17).

980 S 981 (*c.* 1035 AD; Rob 85).

981 S 981 and S 1224. It also occurs in S 1519: the testator clearly conveys the idea that the land in question is free from any claims by a third party, otherwise commonly described with OE *unbesacan* (below, n. 1023). Conversely, at least two leases by bishops (S 1399 [1033×1038 AD; Rob 87] and S 1409) provide that transferred land may become forfeit, though it is preferable to understand the original lessor as the recipient, of course.

– presumably, because the final beneficiary was a religious community.[982] However, asserting the Church's claims to its own land leased a few generations ago evidently did not always go smoothly:

> Estates leased for three lives had an unpleasant habit of beginning to resemble patrimony by the time the lease ran out, and this often made their terms difficult to enforce.[983]

This in turn likely caused potential obliviscence regarding their on-paper non-alienable nature. An exacerbating factor could have been the waxing effective power of the Cerdicings that enabled them enforcing their more onerous claims (above, p. 143). Multi-generational leases from the Church had been common since at least the 8th century,[984] yet the first outspoken concern about their forfeitability (962 AD) conspicuously coincides with the time of intensifying administrative potential of royal power.[985] Inviolability of ecclesiastical landed endowment was questioned when young King Æthelred seized some of Abingdon, Rochester, Old Minster, and Glastonbury's properties.[986] Hemming left a tendentious but nonetheless noteworthy passage that laymen could expropriate ecclesiastical lands by paying overdue tax on them (LAT. *vectigal*, probably translating OE *heregeld*, although in Classical Latin the word usually means a revenue stream other that of a war tax).[987] A somewhat later *Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis* ("The History of the Church of Abingdon") also complained that the practice of commercial leasing out of monasterial lands to laity had caused their alienation.[988] As discussed above, the legal regulation that leased lands were to revert to the grantor is contained in the part of King Cnut's law-code that with high probability recycled some royal oath, probably forced out from King Æthelred in 1014 AD among conditions of his return from Normandy. The oath was presumably intended to cease land expropriations, including, on this reading, leased estates, as one of his oppressive policies.[989]

Crucially, even if the classical triad of the Weberian ideal-typical sort might well explicate early to mid-Saxon socio-legal conditions of tenure, the more time passed the more inevitable shifts and transformations were. In about a century before the Norman Conquest land was being exchanged much more freely and actively than before. This probably indicates dilution of earlier limitations.[990] And because the book-, folk-, loanland model is built, out of necessity, largely on documentation mostly confined to "Greater" Wessex, the assumption that non-West Saxon lands – not or poorly covered by extant documentation – were governed by the same rules remains, strictly speaking, only an extrapolation.

Many of such conundrums have been recognised before. Approaching the subject from outside Anglo-Saxonist tenets, Susan Reynolds contended that a century of socio-economic and political development after *c.* 900 AD blurred previous opposition between folkland and bookland. This, she suggested, happened to a degree that OE *bōcland*, to judge from some '[t]enth- and eleventh-century homilies', could mean 'nothing more specific than one's own land [of] everyone who mattered'.[991] Similarly, Stephen Baxter and John Blair later urged

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982 *Cf.* below, n. 1137. How widespread the practice of leasing land longer than one generation used to be is impossible to say. Most of the extant Anglo-Saxon leases were for the duration of three. Seven documents (S 933 [1014 AD], 1254 [718×745 AD], 1262 [798×822 AD], 1279 [899 AD], 1328 [973 AD], 1366, 1403 [1047×1057 AD; Rob 107]) relate about two-generation contracts, and further seven (S 356, 430, 467, 565, 1278 [872 AD], 1290, 1416 [892 AD]) about four-generation ones. An exceptional five-generation lease is S 1272 (849 AD). *Domesday Book* mentions only four lifelong leases (*DB* I, fol. 167b [GLS 34,8]; *DB* II, fols. 286a [SUF 1,88], 361b [SUF 14,49], 444b [SUF 68,5]): one from King Edward (to a sheriff), three from the Church.

983 Baxter 2007, p. 177. Revealing cases are discussed by Hudson 2012, pp. 100–102.

984 Besides some actually preserved documents (above, n. 982), to this effect speaks the (eventually futile) attempt by the Synod of Chelsea (816 AD) to limit leasing of church lands to one generation only (Burghart and Wareham 2008, p. 92).

985 Molyneaux 2015, pp. 116–199.

986 Keynes 1980, pp. 177–181.

987 Baxter 2007, p. 106.

988 Hudson 2007, I, p. 218.

989 See an extended commentary on this passage by Lambert 2017, p 318 (n. 70).

990 Naismith 2012; 2016.

991 Reynolds 1994, p. 334.

> [...] to distinguish between specific characteristics which are unique to bookland, which are few, and those common to bookland and other forms of tenure, which are many.[992]
>
> Such and related arguments have most recently been promoted by John Blair. While narrowing down the meaning of OE *folcland* and renouncing its catch-all nature, he postulated that OE *bōcland* had become a similar umbrella term 'by at least the 960s' and had 'no precise meaning at all by the 1060s', by which time 'the foundation of English landholding [...] is best understood as straightforward allodial possession'.[993]
>
> None of these incongruences negates the general validity of the assiduously built tripartite scheme *per se*. Rather, they suggest treating it more as a serviceable but nevertheless approximation only of Anglo-Saxon tenurial principles, so far removed from modern strict definitions and legal demarcation lines. With so many reservations, concessions, and exceptions, it is perhaps worthwhile to view Anglo-Saxon tenurial forms less as discrete and mutually exclusive and more as located along some sort of spectrum of greater or lesser freedom from encumbrance, with some transitional grey zones in between.

3.4.4.3 sociolinguistics of late Anglo-Saxon landed proprietorship

A dimension that warrants attention may be that of sociolinguistics of how land was held in late Anglo-Saxon England. Bookland in strict legal terms, as it presents itself in scholarly literature (see VIGNETTE 3), may have been inadequate in regard to the actual late Anglo-Saxon tenurial conditions. But OE *bōcland* still found application as late as King Cnut's legal promulgations by Wulfstan. Such longevity and known contexts indicate that OE *bōcland* was not necessarily used *ad libitum*. Arguments can be mustered that it got fossilised as a specifically southern English, "Saxon",[994] and, importantly, as a traditional monarchocentric lexical tool to refer to the most privileged tenures on the spectrum of freedom in Anglo-Saxon tenurial forms that could also go under other names and enjoy multiple modes of description.

Two among the most readily available arguably were OE *landrīca* and *sacu ond sōcn* (MODE *sake and soke*, LAT. *saca et soca*). On its own, OE *sōcn* as a legal term denoted a juridical bond between a person and a lord who was entitled to the former's *wītu* and *wergild* forfeitures.[995] OE *wīte* (sing. of OE *wītu*) had been a traditional term for a punitive fine since King

992 Baxter and Blair 2006, p. 21.

993 Blair 2020, pp. 228–229. Hence, perhaps, why the Anglo-Norman translator of I Cn 11, p. 295, and II Cn 13:1, 77:1, pp. 317, 365, in the so-called *Instituta Cnuti* rendered OE *bōcland* as LAT. *allodium* – another equally complicated category which, all things considered, on the Continent came closest to bookland. The translator of *Quadripartitus* normally preferred expressions that revolve around notions of heritability (*terra hereditatis*, *terra testamentalis* [*hereditaria*], etc.) but in II Eg 2, p. 197, (s)he chose LAT. *feodum* and in I Atr 1:14, p. 219, LAT. *terra libera*, as did the translator of *Consiliatio Cnuti* in I Cn 11, p. 295, and II Cn 13:1, 77:1, pp. 317, 365.

994 Thus, the only candidate for Reynolds's 'tenth- and eleventh-century homilies' is Vercelli homily 10 (also reproduced in Nap 49). The homily cannot be dated or located with any certainty beside traces of Mercian composition and archaic syntax and morphology (Scragg 1992, p. 194). The homily uses OE *bōcland* to translate generic LAT. *terra* from Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma* (book II). The context is purely moralistic. Jesus scolds a hubristic rich man for not sharing with the poor, threatens him with a punishment by stopping rains from pouring on his earth (OE *eorþe*), and points out that they belong to Him and are not the rich man's bookland (ll. 170–172). Importantly, the homilist still treats bookland as a property of a well-to-do person (*sumum welegum men*) and, with the moral of this passage, it still connoted some exclusiveness of a rich man's agricultural *eorþe*. Landed proprietorship as a didactic metaphor is not alien to Anglo-Saxon religious genres, see Clarke 2012.

995 At least in the Scandinavian regions, to judge from *Domesday Book* and S 1461a (*c.* 1020–1023 AD), this sense of "soke" also developed to denote the territory whose dwellers owe such fines to a given landlord (Kristensen 1975, pp. 74–85). At the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, "soke" could also mean an ecclesiastical parish, and the said meaning was also borrowed into Old Norse (Blair 2006, pp. 430–432). On a lexical

Æthelberht of Kent's time[996] and eagerly employed throughout West Saxon legislation.[997] As a designator of this bond, soke most commonly appears in the enumerative syndetic alliterative formula "sake and soke". It in turn is presently understood as a lord's right/privilege to profits of justice that otherwise remained a regal prerogative.[998]

Though used in royal documentary and legal prose too, both OE *landrīca* and *sacu ond sōcn* seem to have originated outside the royal chancery and in sociolinguistic environment removed from it. By King Cnut's reign, the latter formula had become geographically unrestricted,[999] but it first circulated for about half a century in exclusively Scandinavian contexts – lexical, geographical, or both.[1000] Later still, *Domesday Book* provided separate lists for holders of soke only for Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire[1001] (with an anomalous exception of lathes Sutton and Aylesford in Kent).[1002] Furthermore, of the 503 mentions of LAT. *saca et soca* in *Domesday Book*, when mapped, 469 belong to the "Danelaw" shires.[1003] Granted, the fiscal-juridical rights of "sake and soke" and those by default enjoyed by bookland-holders were not fully identical, at least superficially. Some revenues that, as much as we can tell, used to be stock prerequisites embedded in earlier bookland privileges were not on all occasions mentioned together with "sake and soke".[1004] So, in the technical sense, soke rights were probably narrower. Nonetheless, in *Domesday Book* LAT. *saca et soca* seems to sometime cover all such prerequisites and must therefore have been an umbrella expression.

Pre-1066 possessors of such revenues and dues passed under various vernacular lexemes. A native Old English formation, OE *landrīca* (lit. a person who holds power over land) was one of them and appears synonymous to OE (*land*)*hlāford*.[1005] Curiously, however, OE

level, OE *sōcn* was a productive element in the legal register and figures in terms like OE *hāmsōcn* (assault on home), *ciricsōcn* (attending church or seeking its protection) and others.

996 Abt 9, p. 3.

997 *Gesetze* II, pp. 246–247 (*s.v.* "wite"). Wulfstan in his *Laws of Edward the Elder and Guthrum* identified *wīte* as an outright "English" counterpart to the "Danish" *lahslit* (EGu 2, 3:2, 4:1, 6, 7:2, 8, 9, pp. 130–132). See further Stattel 2019, p. 166 (and references in n. 14).

998 The discussion of "(sake) and soke" has a long tradition, so references to only the latest tip of a historiographical iceberg are provided: Baxter 2009; Lambert 2017, pp. 323–325; Purkiss 2019, p. 157.

999 It occurs, e.g., in S 968 (1020 AD), a grant of judicial and financial rights to Archbishop Æthelnoth of Canterbury (in office 1020–1038).

1000 S 659 (956 AD) and S 681 (959 AD), two royal grants in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, respectively; S 1661 (Rob 68), two private grants in the County Durham to St Cuthbert, exact dating upset by the incompleteness of the record but likely c. 1010 AD; *Becwæð*, an oath formula to assert property rights to inherited property, probably originating at the turn of the millennium, Scandinavian context is maintained through impregnation with Old Norse borrowings: OE *crafian* (< ON *krefja*), *cwyddian* (< ON *kveðja*), *toft* (likely < ON *topt*), *unsac* (could be a native formation but ultimately derived from ON *sekr*: Pons-Sanz 2013, p. 160 *et passim*); II Cn 71:3, p. 358, which specifies *heriot* of a king's *thegn* 'among the Danes' (*mid Denum*) who has "his soke".

1001 *DB* I, fols. 280c (NTT S5), 298c (YKS 36), 336a (LIN C2–3), 337a (LIN T5).

1002 Perhaps, owing to a particular hold the "sake and soke" formula took in the lexicon of the Domesday commissioners charged with surveying Kent: it gets 12 mentions in this county, which is almost a third of all mentions in non-"Danelaw" shires. Kent is outmatched only by Staffordshire (14 mentions) which lies next to the Danelaw anyway.

1003 Suffolk (×220), Norfolk (×47), Northamptonshire (×63), Leicestershire (×43), Lincolnshire (×42), Huntingdonshire (×18), Yorkshire (×13), Nottinghamshire (×9), Derbyshire (×5), Essex (×5), Cambridgeshire (×3), Hertfordshire (×1). Suffolk's skyrocketing breakaway from the next county should be explained by scribal procedures rather than some local juridical abnormality.

1004 OE *toll ond team* and *infangenþeōf* (Lambert 2017, pp. 323–332).

1005 On their practical synonymity, *pace* Williams 1995, p. 73, see Baxter 2009, pp. 404–405; Lambert 2017, pp. 127 (n. 59), 312.

landrīca first occurred in laws aimed at the "Danelaw" – the *Wihtbordesstan* edict[1006] and the Wantage code.[1007] Only in Wulfstan's lexicon, itself permeated with Norse borrowings, does OE *landrīca* lose its geographical anchoring.[1008] Nevertheless, one of the manuscripts of King Cnut's code contains an important continuation of Wulfstan's original text. Where all other versions read that false witnesses must pay a fine to the king or *landrīca*, Cotton Nero A i adds "who has his soke" (*þe his socne ahe*).[1009] This four-word expansion indicates that even late in the period OE *landrīca* potentially bore some Nordic flavour.[1010] In the semiotic triangle (above, p. 32), OE *landrīca* did not stand for a separate socio-legal referent but was merely a lexical expression of a wider concept/reference. A Canterbury glossary of *c.* 1000 AD renders LAT. *fundos* (acc. plur. of *fundus*, lit. land, farm, estate) as *bocland ł landrice*.[1011] It is then unsurprising to find OE *landrīca* in the *Northumbrian Priests' Law* in reference to landed proprietors who owe fines to the king,[1012] and also paired with the king's *thegn* (*cyninges þegn oððe ænig landrica*), who too owes the Crown his punitive fines.[1013]

Crucially, as late as the 990s royal legislators might have thought of any bookland-holder and a king's *thegn* as two sides of the same coin. King Æthelred's Woodstock and Wantage codes were if not a legislative tandem intended to cover "Saxon" England and the "Five Boroughs" respectively, then at least closely linked pieces.[1014] Both assign some of the punitive fines to a royal prerogative but vary their formulations. The Woodstock law had only the king receive all *wītu* that a bookland-holder may be liable to, and royal reeves were to know of all payments on charges against bookland-holders.[1015] Its Wantage counterpart reserves the rights of soke over the king's *thegns* to the king alone.[1016] As argued above (p. 177), "soke" in a juridical sense likely was non-West Saxon in origin. On this interpretation, both codes legislated essentially on one and the same matter.[1017] Discrepancy in formulations and resorting to various lexical means could stem from appropriateness

1006 IV Eg 8:1, pp. 210–212. On the intended region, see Wormald 1999, p. 317, and above, pp. 168–169. Another Nordicism in the text is OE *wǣpengetæc* (< ON *vápnatak*) in IV Eg 6, p. 210 (Pons-Sanz 2013, pp. 75–76, 177).

1007 III Atr 3:2, 3:4, 4:1, 4:2, 5, 7, pp. 228–230.

1008 VIII Atr 8, p. 265, repeated in I Cn 8:2, p. 292; II Cn 37, p. 338.

1009 II Cn 37, p. 338.

1010 The reservation "potentially" is important here because the same scribe had a similar elaboration in II Cn 73a:1, p. 360, featuring no Old Norse lexis.

1011 BL, MS Harley 3376, fol. 94v (Oliphant 1966, p. 208). I confess that a precise understanding of this gloss eludes me. As a strong *a*-stem neuter noun, OE *land* appears in acc. plur. still as *land*, hence the spelling form *bocland* is consistent with *fundos*. But to be acc. plur., *landrice* needs to be a nominalisation of strong-declension masculine adjective (lit. land-rich), which OE *landrīca* otherwise is not (it is a weak-declension masculine noun instead). Alternatively, it could theoretically be acc. sing. of OE strong *ja*-stem neuter noun *landrīce* in a putative sense of "power over land". But when belonging to this grammatical class, OE *landrīce* is attested to mean rather "realm" or "geographical part of the world" (Asia, Europe, Africa; *OEOr*, book I, chap 1:4, p. 26; book II, chap 2:3, p. 108), which does not ideally match either LAT. *fundus*, or OE *bōcland*. A possibility must be entertained that the spelling *e* reflects the late Old English levelling of unstressed vowels. What is important, howbeit, is that in about 1000 AD, in the South of England notions of landed proprietorship got their expressions by both traditional Kentish/West Saxon and newer Anglo-Scandinavian lexical means.

1012 Northu 54:1, 59, pp. 383, 384. The provenance of this text and Wulfstan's authorship are debated, but at any rate, the overall spirit and tune are unmistakably Wulfstanesque.

1013 Northu 58, p. 384.

1014 Wormald 1999, p. 326–330; Stattel 2019, pp. 168–169.

1015 I Atr 1:14, p. 218. Lambert 2017, p. 319 (n. 73), correctly indicates that Agnes Robertson's interpretation that reeves were to be physically present at such instances 'is too strong a reading'.

1016 III Atr 11, p. 230.

1017 This observation has, of course, been made before, e.g., by Wormald 1978, p. 65; Reynolds 1994, p. 334; Hudson 2012, p. 95.

to various social and lexical surroundings and the intended audience's Koselleckian *Erwartungshorizont* and *Erfahrungsraum*.

All told, potentially, OE *bōcland* simply carried less meaningful weight outside "Saxon" England. Consequently, it was sidestepped in favour of more familiar ways of expressing a similar concept or referring to the same or similar practice: OE *landrīca* as a shorthand for the circumlocution *men þe boclond hæbben* of the Woodstock code, and "sake and soke" as a shorthand for the rights conferred onto such people.

3.4.4.4 landed proprietorship and royal lordship

Domesday Book further bears important testimonies. The post-Conquest administrators who wrote it were not schooled in the West Saxon tradition and were largely indifferent to, which enables a more multifaceted perspective. With pre- and some post-Conquest evidence combined, a possible synthesis of the late Anglo-Saxon kings' claims on land and its holders includes:

- entitlement to a portion of a criminal's property:[1018] reserved for bookland-holders and Surrey holders of "sake and soke";[1019]
- king's exclusive entitlement to punitive fines (OE *wītu*, LAT. *forisfacturae*): from bookland-holders, king's *thegns*, Kentish allodiaries (LAT. *allodiarii*)[1020] who have "their sake and soke", Yorkshire holders of "sake and soke" (shared with the earl);[1021]
- military service and forfeiture of land to the king for shirking it: demanded from bookland-holders, Worcestershire free men (LAT. *liberi homines*) who have "sake and soke", and Berkshire warriors (LAT. *milites*);[1022] before the Conquest, due performance of military obligations was considered to confer on an landholder the 'right of disposing of it or giving it to whomsoever he prefers' at deathbed, without qualifications of the nature of tenure;[1023]
- forfeiture of land to the king (sometimes earl, too) for offences: applied to outlaws' bookland irrespective of their commendation, *thegns* in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire who have "sake and soke";[1024]
- payment of death-duty in form of military equipment to the king: required from various tiers of king's *thegns*, Berkshire king's *thegns* or "household warriors" (LAT. *tainus vel miles regis dominicus*),[1025] free men, and burgesses who served in king's host in Archenfield (Herefords.);[1026]

1018 OE *infangenþeōf*. Contention that it originated as a borrowing from Old Norse is untenable (Pons-Sanz 2013, p. 448). See also Lambert 2017, pp. 323–332.

1019 VI As 1:1, p. 173, and *DB* I, fol. 32a (SUR 5,28).

1020 The use of this continental Latin term in *Domesday Book* is restricted to Circuit 1, where Kent lies. It must be a scribal terminological convention rather than some local tenurial peculiarity.

1021 I Atr 1:14, p. 218, III Atr 11, p. 230; and *DB* I, fol. 1b (KEN D16–17), 298c (YKS 36).

1022 II Cn 77–77:1, p. 364; *DB* I, fols. 172a (WOR C5) and 56c (BRK B10).

1023 …*habbe he* [*land*] *unbesaken on dæge* ⁊ *æfter dæge to syllanne* ⁊ *to gyfane ðam ðe him leofost sy* (II Cn 79, p. 366). Note that this right was recorded in a putative royal promise, hence chances are that it had been violated.

1024 II Cn 13:1, p. 316; and *DB* I, fol. 280c (NTT S4). Regarding outlaws, II Cn 13:2, p. 316, and *DB* I, fols. 262c (CHS C4), 280c (NTT S2), 298d (YKS C40), and 336c (LIN C33) endow the king with a monopoly to restore their properties and/or status. *Cf. DB* I, fol. 262c (CHS S4): violation of king's peace by a free man was punishable by property confiscation and outlawry, revertible only by king's will.

1025 What "household *thegn*" meant is not contextually clear from the text. The only other mention found for this study is in *DB* II, fol. 203a (NFK 12,16).

1026 II Cn 71:1–5, p. 358; *DB* I, fols. 56c (BRK B10), 179a (HEF C5), and 181a (HEF 1,49). It is striking that the *heriot* of a "midmost *thegn*" in King Cnut's law (II Cn 71:2, p. 358) is identical to those in *Domesday Book* just

- payment of death-duty commuted to money to the king: expected of *thegns* in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire – three marks (£2) to the sheriff from those with fewer than six manors, £8 to the king from those with more, – and from a king's *thegn* 'among the Danes' who has "his soke" (£4);[1027] also possibly of Kentish allodiaries who have "sake and soke", but the text is silent on the form;[1028]
- occasional mutually exchangeable use of "*thegn*" and "free man" (LAT. *tainus* and *liber*[*alis*]/*francus homo*): in *Domesday Book*, especially "Little", often enough to suggest a degree of synonymity but too infrequently and irregularly to discern any coherent pattern;[1029] consistently in one of the Anglo-Norman translations of King Cnut's laws, the *Instituta Cnuti*;[1030] two and only times in the *Constitutiones de Foresta*;[1031]
- the only time the word "bookland" (LAT. *bochelandum*) appears in the Domesday material[1032] it gets applied to the "land of fifteen *thegns*" with the total fiscal value of 2.125 *hides* in Devonshire; "Great" Domesday calls it simply LAT. *terra*,[1033] but the *terrae occupatae* section of Exon Domesday describes it with one of the regular Domesday formulae to indicate full freedom of alienation.[1034]

Accordingly, *Domesday Book* and earlier sources make an impression that Anglo-Saxon monarchs laid exclusive royal claims to exclusive lordship over the most privileged tenures and their holders. Outside the West Saxon tradition, we can observe tangible lexical and conceptual overlaps when post-Conquest scribes needed to record conditions of such

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cited, with the only deviation in that the law allows commutation into monetary form (see APPENDIX 2). Also important to note that the *Dunsæte* region, where they dichotomy "elite *vs* rank-and-file" was expressed as "*thegn*-born and *ceorl*-born", has been connected to Archenfield.

1027 *DB* I, fols. 280c (NTT S2–3) and 298 (YKS C40), II Cn 71:3, p. 358.

1028 *DB* I, fol. 1b (KEN D17).

1029 Already mentioned *DB* I, fols. 280c (NTT S4) and 172a (WOR C5); king or another lord's *thegn* or free man "with soke" (LAT. *cum soca*): *DB* I, fol. 249d (STF 12,10), *DB* II, fols. 123a (NFK 1,99) 139b (NFK 1,227), and 186a (NFK 9,165); replacement of otherwise "king's *thegns*" for "king's free men" at the end of folios for Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk: *DB* II fols. 1a, 99a (ESS [89]), 109a, 272b (NFK [65]), 281a, and 447a (SUF [75]); qualification of *thegns* as "free men" and vice versa in the same entries: *DB* I, fols. 154d (OXF 1,7b), 260a (SHR 6,3), 264c (CHS 2,20), 249b–c (STS 11,39 and STS 11,50), *DB* II, fols. 204b (NFK 12,32), and 421a (SUF 37,6); qualification of some *thegns* (sometimes of the king or other lords) as "free men" and vice versa in different entries: Ælfric of Buckland Tout Saints, Alweard the Stumpy, Burgheard son of Earl Ælfgar, Áki the Dane, Edwin of Melton, Ketill Alder, Gauti housecarl of Earl Harold, Ælfhere of Harford, Godwine son of Ælfhere, Alwine of Latchingdon ("free men" in *DB* I, fol. 112c [DEV 24,28]; *DB* I, fol. 113a [DEV 25,25]; *DB* II, fols. 63b [ESS 32,3] and 301b [SUF 4,31]; *DB* I, fols. 62c [BRK 44,4], 63b [BRK 62,1] and *DB* II, fols. 46a [ESS 24,45], 91b [ESS 53,1], and 312a [SUF 6,85]; *DB* II, fols. 202b [NFK 12,4], 204a [NFK 12,27], and 355b [SUF 13,2]; *DB* II, fols. 223a [NFK 19,15], 230a [NFK 21,2], 233a [NFK 21,24], 233d [NFK 21,27–28], 264b [NFK 48,1–3], and 271a [NFK 60,1]; *DB* II, fol. 294b [SUF 3,56]; *DB* II, fols. 244b [NFK 27,1], 265b [NFK 49,3], and 269a [NFK 54,1]; *DB* II, fols. 88a [ESS 44,1–2], 153b [NFK 7,1], and 305b [SUF 6,12]; *DB* II, fol. 3a [ESS 1,6]; but *thegns* in *Exon DB* 396a3; *Exon DB* T.O. 498a5; *DB* I, fols. 147a [BUK 13,3] and *DB* II, fol. 152d [NFK 6,6]; *DB* I, fols. 196b [CAM 17,4], 138a [HRT 20,13], and 138a [HRT 22,1]; *DB* II, fol. 203a [NFK 12,16]; *DB* II, fols. 254a [NFK 32,2,] 416d [SUF 34,6], and 421a [SUF 37,]; *DB* I, fol. 137c [HRT 17,13] and 129b [MDX 8,4]; *DB* II, fol. 244a [NFK 26,5]; *DB* II, fol. 306a [SUF 6,26]; *DB* II, fol. 53b [ESS 27,8], accordingly).

1030 In Cn 15:1b, p. 612, borrowed from Northu 51, p. 383, *et passim*; In Cn III:7, p. 66; II:59i, p. 73; and translations of II Eg 1:1, p. 197; I Cn 11, p. 295; II Cn 22:2 and 31:1a, pp. 325, 337; Geþyncðo 3, p. 456 (and, by extension, Geþyncðo 2 and 6, pp. 456, 458), Mirce 1:1, p. 462.

1031 Ps Cn for 1, 12, pp. 620, 622.

1032 *Exon DB* 135a4.

1033 *DB* I, fol. 102b (DEV 3,8).

1034 *…ita liberi quod cum suis terris poterant ire ad quemlibet dominum* ('...were so free that they could go with their lands to any lord they wished'; *Exon DB* T.O. 504b5). The case is briefly discussed by Vinogradoff 1908, pp. 342–343.

tenures and people holding them. But royal legal staff commonly and conservatively called the former "bookland" and the latter "(king's) *thegns*".

3.4.4.5 *thegns*, bookland, and royal lordship in theory: terms of submission of "Danelaw" secular elites

It has at some point been posited that only king's *thegns* used to be entitled to booklands and, accordingly, the privilege of "sake and soke".[1035] This postulate exhibits categoricity and leaps in argumentation, and so it has been criticised, not least because of its arbitrariness in interpreting Domesday tenurial formulae.[1036] But the combined list of attested royal tenurial imposts, put together above (§3.4.4.4) cannot be ignored either.

An alternative solution could be that late Anglo-Saxon kings strove to secure exceptional authority over the least encumbered land ("allodial", or "fully own" in Wulfstan's language in *Geþyncðu*) property and their possessors more or less universally across the country, but couched their claims in traditional West Saxon, king-oriented terms. The freedom manifested itself first of all in the hereditary disposition at the owner's own volition and certain juridical-fiscal revenues, for which rights the king could in turn demand *heriot* and all incurred punitive fines, exact military service (sometimes indeed at the five-*hide* quota, at other times differently) as well as confiscate (commandeer?) lands for defaulting it. Historically, south of the Thames, the seat of royal power, such tenures often came with royal diplomas, even if not recent, and so were likely appropriately referred to as "booklands", and their recipients not infrequently enjoyed royal patronage and were no less appropriately called *thegns* by kings. This personal component was so important that it kept a West Saxon *thegn*'s death-duty the most onerous in Wulfstan's much later *heriot* list (see Appendix 2). When the Cerdicings rapidly expanded their political sway between Kings Edward the Elder and Eadred's reigns, they also expanded West Saxon traditional claims on land. These got conceptualised and described in the familiar language of royal lordship, even if, to judge from the same tariff, King Alfred's successors were content with more modest *heriots* from the local elite, perhaps on account of (at least initially) not offering *Königsnähe* to non-West Saxon elites (above, p. 166). The Winchester redaction of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* boastfully reports a series of King Edward's triumphs in Southern "Danish Mercia" after the major battle at Tempsford[1037] in a very illustrative language. Not only do the locals "submit" (OE *cyrran*) and "yield" (OE *būgan*) to him, but they also "choose" (OE *cēosan*) and "seek" (OE *sēcan*) him as lord (OE *hlāford*) and protector or patron (OE *mundbora*), which act they also sometimes confirm with oaths (*cf.* above, §3.4.2.1). A nice-and-clear dissection of political and personal commendation in this period is hardly possible. It is therefore not at all surprising neither to find expectations of non-royal lords' protection extended over their men,[1038] nor that 'all the army in East Anglia swore agree-

1035 Roffe 1989; 2007, pp. 147–161; previously also less insistently by Banton 1981, p. 278, 288–289, and Williams 1987.

1036 Baxter 2007, pp. 238–240, 266–271; Hudson 2012, p. 60. See also discussion by Clarke 1994, pp. 130–134. I, too (Sukhino-Khomenko 2018a, pp. 51–56), allowed myself certain reservations about the methodology pursued by Dr Roffe and Rachel Reid, who had pioneered it in 1920, namely that it relies too much on equating post-Conquest LAT. *baro* (or its vernacular rendition) and pre-Conquest OE *cyninges þegn* across the board. While this equivalence is no question sometimes evident, it was by far not universal, and in any case construing institutional continuity off lexical precedent should be not straightforward.

1037 *ASC*: *s.aa.* 914–920 AD (MS A). The annal for 914 AD is also shared with MSS C and D (*s.a.* 915 AD).

1038 Baxter 2007, p. 207–208.

ment with him [= King Edward], that they would (agree to) all that he would'.[1039] Thirty years later the Scots took a similarly-formulated oath.[1040] Formulations such as these starkly resemble *Swerian*'s words that the inferior party must "choose" the lord's "will",[1041] as well as King Edward's reception of his councillors' agreement to 'cooperate with him in his efforts, favouring what he favoured and discountenancing what he discountenanced',[1042] and King Edmund's similar reception of an oath from his subjects that explicitly equated fealty to a lord and loyalty to the king.[1043]

There is, moreover, a non-zero chance that as part of this process "Danelaw" landed proprietors had their property rights confirmed by King Edward and that this was more than merely a symbolic act. The *Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi* narrates how after the death of King Edgar a lawsuit unfolded in Huntingdonshire.[1044] The plaintiffs claimed land through their great-grandaunt who, they maintained, petitioned King Edward at Cambridge when *comes* Toli (Jarl Toglos [= ON *Toglaus?] of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) forcefully occupied Huntingdonshire. The court, staffed with people who allegedly remembered (*sic*) those events, rejected the claim by ruling that she had done it too late, because the king moved into Cambridgeshire after he had already won Huntingdonshire. The implication is that whenever a territory in the "Danelaw" was being conquered, local landed proprietors were made a limited and proverbial binding offer they could not easily refuse: to become the king's liegemen and retain their landed property on a West Saxon template (whereby also integrating into the governmental apparatus), or else to forfeit land and status. The "Danelaw" elites had to deal with a classical trilemma aptly formulated by the German economist Albert Hirschman as a triad of "exit", "voice", and "loyalty". Some preferred (or were allowed) to "exit" and forgo the monarch's invitation to co-optation: after submitting at Bedford, Jarl Þórketill and the people who decided to join him, the Winchester chronicle says, chose to leave for the Continent with King Edward's permission and assistance.[1045] Others, like Toli–Toglos, went for "voice". The majority though, one would expect, chose "loyalty" and complied. Indeed, some Old Norse names appear in King Æthelstan's diplomas. Perhaps, a brokered concomitant of the violence-free submission were more reserved demands of *heriot*. Whether this co-optation was backed by royal diplomas is a different matter altogether. The available evidence does not corroborate "booklandisation" of the "Danelaw" *stricto sensu*, though it cannot be full in the received form (above, §3.2.1.1). Yet, even without an otherwise lost putative documentary output, there is evidence that subjecting "Danish" lands to royal bookland claims went at least with partial success. As elucidated above, the Crown was able to confiscate booklands.

1039 …*eal se here on Eastenglum him swor annesse þæt hie eal þæt woldon þæt he wolde* (*ASC*: 917 AD [MS A]).

1040 *ASC*: 946 AD (MSS A, B, C, D).

1041 …*to him gebeah* ⁊ *his willan geceas* (Baxter 2007, p. 205).

1042 …*hwa* […] *wolde* ⁊ *on ðære geferræddenne beon ðe he wære,* ⁊ *þæt lufian ðæt he lufode,* ⁊ *ðæt ascunian ðæt he ascunode* (II Ew 1:1, p. 142).

1043 …*omnes jurent* […] *fidelitatem Eadmundo regi, sicut homo debet esse fidelis domino suo, sine omni controversia et seductione, in manifesto, in occulto, et in amando quod amabit, nolendo quod nolet* ('...all shall swear [...] that they will be faithful to King Edmund, even as it behoves a man to be faithful to his lord, without any dispute or dissension, openly or in secret, favouring what he favours and discountenancing what he discountenances'; III Em 1, p. 190).

1044 *LE*, book II, chap 25, pp. 98–99. This admittedly partisan account has been cited and interpreted many times, e.g., by Abrams 2001, pp. 138–140; Wareham 2005, pp. 62–64. In the following, the interpretation by Abels 1988, pp. 89–90, is generally preferred.

1045 *ASC*: 916 AD (*recte* 919; MS A).

According to the same account in *Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi*, the same jurors produced a statement that apart from but two small estates,

> [...] there was no land so free in the whole of Huntingdonshire that it could not be lost through forfeiture.[1046]

Charter evidence on land forfeitures does not indicate the nature of tenure and more often is concerned with the charges presented: treason,[1047] conspiracy,[1048] theft or robbery,[1049] murder,[1050] adultery,[1051] helping disgraced exiles,[1052] unlawful seizure,[1053] "unjust" possession,[1054] insurrection during a military campaign,[1055] or other unnamed offences.[1056] One particular case, already touched upon above, however, illustrates how an estate in Northamptonshire (i.e. the "Danelaw"), for which no previous documentation is known, was forfeited to the king for malicious witchcraft and then "booked" by him to the intended victim of the curse.[1057]

Available evidence might further indicate that by the time the "Danelaw" secular elite were subjected to these new personal–tenurial relationships with the king in the 910–920s, they had already been taking (or taken) a form recognisable from later examples in "Greater" Wessex. The next section will elaborate on this supposition.

3.4.4.6 *thegns*, bookland, and royal lordship in earlier practice: encumbered land maketh king's man?

A recent scholarly revision of the Anglo-Saxon royal governance before the reign of King Edgar holds that the Cerdicing dynasty governed by acting upon those whom George Molyneaux aptly calls their 'greater subordinates'.[1058] His conclusion dovetails with that of Tom Lambert, namely that all available records disclose a royal privilege to confiscate only lords' own landed properties, hardly the actual cultivators' plots.[1059] The cited passages in the preceding section thus strongly imply King Edward the Elder's imposition on the "Danelaw" elites of rules of a zero-sum game, in which their lands from then on were at

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1046 …*non erat terra tam libera que per forisfacturam non posset iri perditum* (*LE*, book II, chap 25, p. 99). The two estates immune to confiscations were valued by the author at four *hides*, a marginal number out of the 800 *hides* in Huntingdonshire in *Domesday Book* (Lambert 2017, p 320).

1047 S 361.

1048 S 937; S 414 and S 415 (both 931 AD). The two latter documents, though narrating on one and the same event, are obvious forgeries and contain supernatural episodes. Susan Kelly allows for some grain of the truth in the story of a failed attempt on King Æthelstan's life, if barely (BACS XI, pp. 216–28; repeated in BACS XIII, pp. 77–79). "Little" Domesday corroborates that theft was punishable by confiscation to the Crown: *DB* II, fol. 66b (ESS 32,28).

1049 S 1445, 753 (967 AD; imperfect authenticity), 886 (995 AD). S 883 (995 AD) includes both theft and murder. S 927 (1012 or 1013 AD; imperfect authenticity) lists robbery, adultery, military insurrection, "and many other nefarious crimes" (*multisque aliis nefariis sceleribus*).

1050 S 892 (998 AD). There is Domesday evidence to the same effect: *DB* I, fol. 262c (CHS S4).

1051 S 901 (1002 AD) and S 927.

1052 S 916 (1007 AD) and S 926 (1012 AD).

1053 S 877.

1054 S 796 and S 797 (both 974 AD).

1055 S 927.

1056 S 687, 842 (982 AD), 927, 1229. One matron Leoflæt lost two Worcester estates due to her "folly" (*ineptia*), according to S 911. The crimes in S 1026 (1055 AD) are not specified, but the diploma is spurious either way.

1057 S 1377 and S 533.

1058 Molyneaux 2015, chap 2.

1059 Lambert 2017, pp. 319–321.

stake. Co-optation of the top crusts of the Cerdicings' new 'greater subordinates' in the "Danelaw" clearly involved close personal interaction with the king and the ongoing ties of *Königsnähe*.[1060] But the numbers crunched in §3.4.3.1 presuppose that the farther a Cerdicing gathered his *thegns*, the fewer of them reported from a given locality even within "Greater Wessex", and only a few assemblies are known north of the Thames (Map 2). And yet, to judge by royal writs, the Cerdicings addressed all local bodies politic using the "king's *thegns*" formula across the kingdom.[1061] Crucially, if *Quadripartitus*'s translation of the Kentishmen's reply to King Æthelstan did not allow for lexical updates, this element of royal discourse was already in place by the 930s. Faint arguments can be mustered that by the time of King Edward the Elder's campaign in the Southern "Danelaw", an oath to the king had already been conceptually mediating a semiotic monarchocentric bond between the referent "all landed proprietor elites" and the symbol "king's *thegns*".

Under 886 AD, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports, 'all the English people [*eall Angelcynn*] that were not under subjection to the Danes' submitted (OE *cyrran*) to King Alfred.[1062] In Bishop Asser's Latin words, they 'turned willingly [...] and submitted themselves to his lordship'.[1063] Alfred's later law-code, or "doom-book" (OE *dōmbōc*) as it termed itself, enjoined 'that every man shall abide carefully by his oath and his pledge' and 'shall forfeit his weapons and his' *ierfe* (lit. [ancestral?] property) if (s)he physically resists detention at a royal residence upon perfidy.[1064] The strand of scholarly thought led by Patrick Wormald sees a causal relation between these two facts and exemplifies it with the story narrated by the *Fonthill Letter*:[1065]

Shortly before King Alfred's death, the then ealdorman of Wiltshire, Ordlaf (d. after 909 AD), interceded before the king on his godson Helmstan's behalf[1066] and assisted him in litigation over five *hides* at Fonthill (Wilts.). The other five, it follows from a complicated Winchester record,[1067] the ealdorman at that time held himself. Besides a share in Fonthill, Helmstan had some unspecified *ierfe* at Tisbury (Wilts.) just south of Fonthill. Tisbury was

1060 Wareham 2005, chaps 1–4; see also above, §3.4.3.2.

1061 King Edward the Confessor's chancery, for example, used the same stock formulae featuring the king greeting his *thegns* when addressing shire communities in Nottinghamshire (S 1160 [1060×1065 AD], *Writs* 119), Yorkshire (S 1067 [1060×1065 AD], *Writs* 7), Staffordshire (S 1140 [1062×1066 AD], *Writs* 96), Shropshire (S 1162 [1060×1061 AD]), Northamptonshire (S 1138 [1053×1066 AD], *Writs* 94), Essex (S 1117 [1042×1044 AD], *Writs* 73, and S 1128 [1052×1053 AD], *Writs* 84), Suffolk, and Norfolk (too many instances to provide a full list), as when addressing their counterparts in Devonshire (S 1161 [1060×1066 AD], *Writs* 120), Hampshire (S 1129 [1053×1066 AD], *Writs* 85), and Dorset (S 1063 [1053×1058 AD], *Writs* 1, and S 1064 [1058×1066 AD], *Writs* 2).

1062 *ASC*: 886 AD (MSS A, D, E)/887 AD (MSS B, C).

1063 *…voluntarie converterunt, et suo dominio se subdiderunt* (*VÆR*, chap 83, p. 69).

1064 *…þæt æghwelc mon his að ⁊ his wed wærlice healde*; […] *þolige his wæpna ⁊ his ierfes* (Af 1–1:4, pp. 46–48). In light of Ælfric's later explanation of OE *þegenlīc*(*e*) with the help of masculinity (above, nn. 568, 569), in present context, a bold suggestion may be that the law actually reads neither "warily" (i.e. prudently) (OE *wærlce*), nor "truthfully" (OE *wǣrlce*), but rather "manly" as in "resolutely" (OE *werlce*). All three readings are harmonious with the contents and spirit of this law, though Jurasinski and Oliver 2021, pp. 106–109, muster a good case to stick to OE *wærlce*. In their comments to the second of the cited clauses, they also propose to understand the delinquent's *ierfe* as his personal rather than family property.

1065 Since Florence Harmer and Dorothy Whitelock's editions, the *Fonthill Letter* (S 1445) has been edited and thoroughly commented on by Keynes 1992, including most superb maps; Brooks 2009; BACS XVIII, pp. 852–862. The text has been discussed many times: among the already cited works, by, e.g., Pratt 2007, pp. 239–240; Baxter 2009, pp. 408–411; Niles 2011; Ammon 2013, *passim*; Lambert 2017, pp. 258–259, 266, 269–270, 317–318; Adair 2023, pp. 101–103, – with further references in each of these.

1066 Ordlaf's godfatherly advocacy was not without parallel: even disgraced earls required mediation (above, p. 146).

1067 S 1284 (900 AD).

a large estate valued at £43 in *Domesday Book* and under-assessed at 20 *hides*, all of which number in Helmstan's hands 'certainly makes a lot of good sense' as 'the more attractive of the available options'.[1068] By this token, Helmstan was an aristocrat in Timothy Reuter's sense and a member of the elite: a total of (at least) 25 *hides* certainly made him notable in the local social landscape, further hinted at by Ordlaf's incidental slip that many wanted to take advantage of Helmstan in his litigation over Fonthill.[1069] Upon a successful resolution, Ordlaf ceded Helmstan's original half of Fonthill back to him as a *lǣn*, but a little while later, Helmstan was convicted of cattle rustling. Then, a royal reeve "swept in" (*swaf on*) and assigned Tisbury to King Edward the Elder and the Fonthill *lǣn* to Ordlaf. When asked by the ealdorman, the reeve justified his actions by pointing out that Helmstan was a thief and a "king's man" (*cinges mon*). The king then outlawed but later pardoned Helmstan,[1070] once again with the ealdorman's mediation, and restored Tisbury to him.

Ordlaf's enquiry with the royal reeve brings the *Fonthill Letter* to the forefront of the current discussion. The change of perspective from the first ('When I asked...') to the third person ('Ordlaf took his land...') in recounting the reeve's response may indicate a – perhaps close to verbatim – reported legal verdict. The inclusion of this detail by Ordlaf speaks to some hesitation on his part: either that king's men's *ierfu* were liable to confiscation at all; or that the king (and not someone else) was to receive them; or, if neither, that Helmstan indeed was a "king's man".

In effect, all three considerations could have been at work at once. King Alfred's "doom-book" prescribed maiming, fines, or compensation for theft.[1071] The laws of King Ine he incorporated had convicted thieves restitute what was stolen and pay a fine.[1072] That known cases of land confiscation[1073] (all in the king's favour) chronologically cluster only after these events may be written off as a skew in the documentary corpus. But one of the earliest and already cited samples of a royal lay grant liberally renounced any entitlement to the estate in question, even should the recipient's (a king's *minister*) heirs commit a crime.[1074] Ordlaf's ignorance of his godson's personal relationship with the king goes beyond the credible. Yet, no other contemporary source mentions anyone by the name of Helmstan interacting with Kings Alfred or Edward.[1075] Neither did, so it may turn out, Helmstan

1068 Keynes 1992, p. 83.

1069 *...ða ongon Higa him specan sona on mid oðran onspecendan ⁊ wolde him oðflitan ðæt lond* ('Higa, together with other claimants, proceeded forthwith to make a claim against him, desiring to obtain the estate from him by litigation'; my emphasis).

1070 Lambert 2017, pp. 269–270, reverses the narrated order of events and entertains a possibility that Helmstan first fled from justice in fear of capital punishment and then was outlawed. On this reading, King Edward simply authoritatively corroborated a *fait accompli*, rather than penalised Helmstan in the first place.

1071 Af 6, 9:2, 16, pp. 52, 54, 58.

1072 Ine 7, 10, pp. 92, 94 – *cf.* Ine 43, p. 108. Many commentators have Helmstan caught red-handed, but in fact, as Wormald 1999, p. 148, pointed out, Helmstan was actually not apprehended *in flagrante*, as the mention of Helmstan's denial being overridden by physical evidence brought against him (most logically, in court) indicates.

1073 *Cf.* a very similar case in S 886 almost one hundred years later.

1074 S 114 (779 AD). The donated estates lay in modern Gloucestershire, a hundred less five kilometres to the south-west from Tisbury.

1075 Keynes 1992, p. 58. The letter mentions that at the time of writing (preliminary placed by Keynes 'nearer *c.* 920 than *c.* 900', also tentatively supported by David Dumville's palaeographical assessment, and Nicholas Brooks's deduction that the extant single sheet was a copy), Helmstan was still alive. Ordlaf's own son Ordwald lived long enough to receive a land grant as a *minister* in 940 AD (S 469). If Ordlaf's godson was about the same age as his biological one, the Helmstan who witnessed S 396 and S 407 *may* have been the "king's man" who (had) owned Tisbury. The argument is highly sinuous and flawed, however:

the thief, however. His Fonthill case was brought to Alfred by Ordlaf and heard by an *ad hoc* commission of the king's courtiers. Even before outlawry, Ordlaf acted as Helmstan's mouthpiece in the king's presence in private chambers (OE *būr*) in (Old) Wardour, despite the fact that this estate lay adjacent to Tisbury and that the king personally conversed with Helmstan's main judicial rival.

Returning to Patrick Wormald's reasoning,

> [...] the significance of cinges mon was precisely that Helmstan had taken an oath of loyalty [in 886 AD] that covered theft,[1076]

– not least because similar oaths have Carolingian precedents in the same century and (re-)occur in Anglo-Saxon royal legislation in the next. His interpretation of the 'oath and pledge' in King Alfred's "doom-book" as the first general oath to the king that would sow the idea of a crime as a public act via infidelity to the king was, as always, elegantly argued. However, it was not as unreservedly received.[1077] Should one, however, look past this discussion, much may fall in place.

Wormald's quote above would benefit from a respectful modification proceeding from arguments advanced since then. As argued, magnates always remained the key (and duly materially incentivised to prosecute thieves in particular)[1078] enforces of royal (legal) policies. King Edward the Elder's Exeter (or "second") law-code (*c.* 905×910 AD),[1079] 'directed at the higher officials',[1080] explicitly connected a landed proprietor's failure to pursue cattle rustlers in his/her estate with breaking 'an oath and pledge which the whole nation has given' and meted out 'such compensation as the' "doom-book" 'declare[s]'.[1081] Before everybody else, this 'oath and pledge' must have thus been extracted from the Cerdicings' 'greater subordinates' on behalf of everyone in their lordship and styled "everyone" or "all people" in contemporary sources.[1082] Therewith they committed to conformity with the king's will, so often (if, perhaps, formulaically) registered in royal diplomas (OE *hīr-ness*?), and part of which was suppression of theft. The main target group likely was that social category whose unifying socially relevant feature was social power consequential of aristocratism that was now being turned to the king's benefit. By this logic and in a bold flight of fantasy, perhaps their lands functioned as the forfeitable "pledges" of sorts that came with the oath. Helmstan's temporary loss of Tisbury may have been of the same sort as Ealdorman Wulfhere's earlier stripping of 'the control and inheritance of his lands'

Helmstan then ought to have served close to forty years; the precise date of the *Fonthill Letter* is unknown; neither are any of the named three persons' ages. Keynes's advice to 'resist the temptation to connect' King Æthelstan's *minister* with the 'erstwhile thief' thus holds.

1076 Wormald 2014, p. 124 *et passim*, an elaboration of Wormald 1999, pp. 144–148.

1077 Reference to woks by like-minded scholars (Simon Keynes, Michael Lapidge, David Pratt, Daniel Thomas) have been collected by Jurasinski and Oliver 2021, p. 285 (n. 14). To them must be added Baxter 2009, pp. 399–400. Criticism or reservation of one or another sort has been expressed by, e.g., Ammon 2013, pp. 518–520; Hudson 2009, pp. 423–430; Lambert 2012, pp. 16–18 *et passim*; 2017, pp. 210–213; Jurasinski and Oliver 2021, pp. 102–111.

1078 Baxter 2009, pp. 398–407; Lambert 2017, pp. 329–333; also above, p. 122.

1079 Wormald 1999, p. 112.

1080 Adair 2023, p. 100.

1081 *Gif hwa ðis oferhebbe ⁊ his að ⁊ his wæd brece, ðe eal ðeod geseald hæfð, bete swa dómboc tæce* (II Ew 5, p. 142). For the use of Alfred's "doom-book" here and elsewhere, see Keynes 1990, pp. 232–233; Jurasinski and Oliver 2021, pp. 148–151.

1082 Molyneaux 2015, pp. 63–65.

resulting from his breach of fealty.[1083] But Wulfhere stops witnessing King Alfred's diplomas after *c.* 877/878 AD, the implication being that he deserted for the viking side upon King Alfred's retreat to the Somerset marshes following Guthrum's raid on Chippenham in January 878 AD. Wulfhere's 'oath which he had sworn to the king' (above, n. 802) was thus probably personal. Helmstan's case, therefore, more likely demonstrates that whomever the king could effectively dispossess, he now considered his man *par excellence*. It is worth recalling that Ælfric the *Thegn* who forfeited Newington (Oxon.) to King Cnut has so far not been identified by PASE with any bearers of this name in contemporary diplomas (above, pp. 116–120). Vague chances are that, if he indeed never appeared at court, in the royalist discourse of Queen Emma's document he attracted his by-name *Thegn* not as an occupational marker. Instead, it could have indicated a social category Ælfric belonged to by virtue of holding forfeitable immovable property. The argument is rather speculative, it must be acknowledged. At any rate, interpretation in this vein re-invigorates David Roffe's argument that only king's *thegns* were entitled to bookland/"sake and soke" (above, p. 182) as the freest form of land tenure. It only swaps the underlying cause and effect and tones down the need for and implication of personal homage, otherwise lacking in many cases.

Either way, for Helmstan, Tisbury was his (inherited?) *ierfe*, for all that he knew. But OE *ierfe* sometimes clearly referred to "booked" lands.[1084] And as much as the monarch was concerned, he was in his right to claim Tisbury because it almost certainly had at some point been granted away by a West Saxon king as a bookland *stricto sensu* – at the very least, once to a local minster.[1085] If Chicklade, where Helmstan was discovered, used to be appurtenant to the head estate at Tisbury a few kilometres to the east, the whole crime took place on his own land.[1086] Simply put, from the royal reeve's perspective, unlike the five leased *hides* at Fonthill, there was no higher lord to take Tisbury but the king, regardless of its owner's *Königsnähe*: perhaps, Helmstan had given his 886 AD 'oath and pledge' to one of the royal agents – maybe even to the very same reeve, – as envisaged by one of King Æthelstan's law-codes.[1087] Ordlaf may have initially regarded such an act as a contravention of previous customs. Being tantamount to Helmstan's lord from commendation in some respects[1088] and in others his actual landlord, Ordlaf may have claimed Tisbury alongside Fonthill in the court that convicted his godson. The reeve's putatively reported speech may have been a prompt, as Ordlaf himself put it, for public intervention to safeguard what the Cerdicings now claimed as theirs and controllable through their agents (*cf.* the later insistence of the royal reeves' cognisance of bookland-holders' payment of fines, above, p. 179). Even 120 years later Archbishop Wulfstan felt the need to reiterate the same principle:

1083 …*potestatem et hereditatem dereliquit agrorum* (S 362).
1084 See above, n. 948, S 1508 (871×899 AD; *SEHD* 10) and, probably, the context of *Soliloquies* (above, n. 969). The most obvious lexical connexion between bookland and OE *ierfe* is, without doubt, the endorsement formula "booked in perpetual inheritance" (OE *on ēce ierfe*; above, n. 617).
1085 S 1256 (759 AD).
1086 Keynes 1992, p. 83.
1087 VI As 10, pp. 181–182.
1088 Previous laws equated a godfather's and a lord's entitlement to compensation (Ine 76, p. 122).

> §13: If anyone does the deed of an outlaw, the king alone shall have power to grant him security. §13:1. And if he has bookland, it shall be forfeited into the hands of the king without regard to the question whose man he is.[1089]

On this, maximalist interpretation of these events, another monarchocentric document of the period may be read in a wholly different light. 886 AD also serves a conventional, if controversial, *terminus post quem* for the written treaty between Guthrum on the one side and King Alfred and 'the counsellors of all the English nation' (*ealles Angelcynnes witan*) on the other.[1090] Notably, the treaty went against the previously observed principles by assigning 'all of us' (*ealle we*) an eight-halfmark man price of pure gold (estimated by modern commentators to be equal to 1,280 West Saxon shillings) and reserving the standard West Saxon 200-shilling *wergild* only to *ceorlas* on *gafolland* and the Danish freedmen.[1091] A contentious problem is whether OE *gafolland* in this instance referred to in- or warland and whether its occupant, ergo, was lackland and rendered tenancy rent or, contrarily, tribute from his own property.[1092] The former reading overall agrees better both with the proposed legal logic here and also in King Æthelred's later treaty with Óláfr Tryggvason – to match the two-tier Anglo-Saxon *wergild* tariff with the one-tier Scandinavian tariff, in which, as will be elaborated on below (§4.4.2.2), ancestral landed proprietorship was complimentary of legal status, – and the later use of OE *gafolland*. The clause immediately after lays out the rules for cleansing of accusations of homicide. It sees the (free) Anglo-Saxons as made of king's *thegns* and everyone else of 'a lower order than that of king's thegn'.[1093] That potential defendants from among the former group required twelve peers not only to cleanse himself from homicide, but also from accusation of any theft worth more than (?) 120 pence (£0.5),[1094] may theoretically indicate a non-negligible number of members in this group. If both clauses legislated on the same legal ranks[1095] and if the eight-halfmark rank absorbed all *ceorlas* with landed property of their own[1096] (their *ierfu*, booklands, or otherwise?), it may be additional evidence for an early expansion of the concept of a king's *thegn* and attendant relationship onto all landed elites under the Cerdicings' sceptre, irrespective of their actual *Königsnähe*. They probably never saw a *lex scripta* in the later form of a physical royal writ. But the embryo of a typical writ greeting formula in King Alfred's preface to *Regula Pastoralis*[1097] may evince that they had been at least exposed to his *verbum regis* and to being (orally?) addressed as "king's *thegns* there-and-there".

Many a lamentable uncertainty may subvert the reconstruction in the foregoing section. As incredible as it is, Helmstan could have, at least in theory, actively served some

1089 §13. *Se ðe útlages weorc gewyrce wealde se cyng ðæs friðes.* §13:1. ⁊ *gyf he bócland habbe, sy þæt forworht ðam cynge to hánde, sy ðæs mannes man ðe he sy* (II Cn 13–13:1, p. 316). For ease of illustration, I allowed myself to alter Agnes Robertson's 'land held by title-deed' and 'vassal' for "bookland" and "man".

1090 Kershaw 2000, pp. 46–50, with references to preceding revisions and their criticism.

1091 AGu 2, p. 126.

1092 Lambert 2018b, pp. 31–32.

1093 …*læssa maga ðone se cyninges ðegn* (AGu 3, p. 126).

1094 AGu 3, p. 126.

1095 Kershaw 2000, p. 56; Lavelle 2010, p. 327.

1096 Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p. 312.

1097 *Ælfred kyning hatեð gretan Wærferð biscep his wordum luflice ond freondlice, ond ðe cyðan hate ðæt…* (Schreiber 2003, p. 193 [ll. 1–2]). King Alfred's *Soliloquies* also mention 'your lord's letter and his seal' (*ðines hlafordes ærendgewrit and hys insegel*; *OESol*, book I, p. 62 [ll. 22–23]). Perhaps, even if writs in their known 11th-century form did not exist yet, the king may have nevertheless enacted at least rudimentary written correspondences with his localities, especially if Asser's statements are given credit (above, p. 142), thus disseminating and reflecting the notion of the recipients as king's *thegns*.

astonishingly long thirty-five or more years and somehow mended his reputation to be allowed on King Æthelstan's retinue to Nottingham in 934 AD. Or he could have been a regular king's *minister*, one of the elusive "median *thegns*" who do not appear elsewhere, as simple as that that. As such, he could have been one of the non-*gelandode* king's *thegns* alluded to by King Æthelstan (above, p. 120). Or Helmstan's *ierfe* could theoretically had been bestowed upon him by a lost diploma of King Alfred at an unknown point. The treaty with Guthrum could have pre-dated 886 AD. Alfred's exhortation to his subjects to abide by a given word could have concerned all vows across the board. And his *thegns* along the border with the Scandinavians may have been his *ministri* assigned here from the West Saxon heartland as a security measure.

Be it as it may, one thing is certain. Whatever made a late Anglo-Saxon aristocrat a "king's man", in this relationship (very possibly corroborated by some, if mediated, oaths), the tenurial component and attendant encumberment had probably became indispensable even before they underpinned King Edward the Elder's offer of "exit–voice–loyalty" to his newly won Scandinavian 'greater subordinates'.

3.4.4.7 *thegns*, bookland, and royal lordship in later practice: Earl Godwine's downfall

An illustration of these royal imposts in practice may be the heated events of 1051 AD (above, p. 101) which would then read very differently than at first glance. The Peterborough redaction of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports that before King Edward the Confessor demanded allegiance of Earl Godwine and his clan's *thegns*, he had ordered the host to be assembled.[1098] It has been plausibly suggested that Edward weakened his opponents by exploiting some of their followers' dual obligations.[1099] Over thirty years in the higher echelons of power, Godwine's family had attracted personal commendations of a good deal of elite. But as the Anglo-Saxon lay elite was for the most part made up of the social category of landed proprietors, as such they acquitted their landed property by performing army service on a royal command. While Earl Godwine was the single most powerful individual in the country after the king, a king he was not. Edward could still call on his exceptional royal authority over them by virtue of his royal rank. If Godwine failed in his political manoeuvre, they could forfeit their holdings on account of a gross *oferhīrness*: defaulting the king's military summons and moving against him. For many, this must have felt like a zugzwang and a forced choice of loyalties. After the king called out for a troop levy, the Worcester chronicler writes, en route to London where the earls were ordered to, their 'force dwindled more and more as time passed'.[1100] With his ensuing demand of the defectors' personal allegiance (above, p. 147), King Edward sealed his victory by eliminating a double-hatting situation of split and conflicting duties arising from personal commendation and general obligation on land.

There are two important take-aways from this contextualisation. One is that it goes against the grain of previous scholarship (above, §2.2.2.3) and subtracts from the pre-Conquest

1098 …*het se cyning bannan uthere, ægðer ge be suðan Temese ge be norðan, eall þet æfre betst wæs* ('...the king ordered the force to be called out both south of the Thames and in the north, all the best of them'; *ASC*: 1048 AD [*recte* 1051; MS E]). The chronicler's elaboration that the summons were directed south of the Thames, too, is of immediate importance, for it was Wessex that Godwine's earldom encompassed.

1099 Abels 1988, p. 88; Clarke 1994, pp. 93–94.

1100 …*his* [Godwine's] *wered wanode æfre þe leng þe swiðor* (*ASC*: 1052 AD [*recte* 1051; MS D]).

evidence that Anglo-Saxon non-royal liegemen were called *thegns* on a regular basis. When the chroniclers wrote about the earls' *thegns*, they probably had in mind magnates who owed military service to the king but because of their commendation found themselves in his enemies' camp. The other is to corroborate the proposition above. It appears, the Cerdicings carried on the same language of power and top-down royal lordship to formulate their relationship with an extended landed elite in the new socio-political circumstances, even if Domesday commissioners later sometimes knew it not only as "*thegns*" but as "free men" or "allodiaries" as well. This lexical-conceptual synonymity and overlap, especially with "free man", will become especially important in comparison with the Old Norse use in Chapter 5. Effectively, William Stubbs had entertained a similar idea, that late Anglo-Saxon magnates owed military service to the king as landed proprietors and not liegemen (above, p. 42). But the current section emphasises the royal perspective in this socio-legal mechanics and nuances the difference between a social and conceptual development. From King Edward's viewpoint, perhaps, the earls' people all held notional "booklands" and all were notionally "(his) *thegns*" inasmuch as he could, to a certain extent, encumber their lands – irrespective of actual diplomas and/or offered *Königsnähe*.

3.4.4.8 *thegns* and Anglo-Saxon land lease

With that in mind, we may better grasp the lexical and social circumstances of Bishop Oswald's leases (and one by a later Worcester bishop, Lyfing). Let us first outline some known details in respect of them.

On a lexical level, there is no discernible pattern as to who got to be called Oswald's *thegn* and who did not. Other lexemes (titles?) saw frequent use, too: OE *cniht*, *mann*, LAT. *fidelis*, *homo*, *compater*, *cliens*, *miles*, etc., and sometimes yet no occupation, title, office, or relation was indicated at all. Thus, one of Oswald's brothers, Os(w)ulf, is styled OE *cniht*;[1101] his other brother, Æthelstan, gets no title,[1102] unless he is the *thegn* from S 1305, S 1331 (977 AD) and S 1343 (981 AD); Oswald's grandnephew Heahstan and distant relative Cynehelm, if Vanessa King's identifications are correct, figure as *ministri* and *thegns*;[1103] and Oswald's step-nephew Leofenath was called LAT. *miles* by Bishop Ealdwulf of Worcester (in office 992–1002; previously Abbot of Peterborough, from 995 AD also Archbishop of York).[1104]

Oswalds' *thegns* are almost complete replicas of their royal versions. In landed wealth some even approach the latter's lower strata,[1105] though others seem to be petty tenants with only minor holdings, as far as the available record goes.[1106] The only observable dividing line runs through the length of the period during which land was conceded – (on paper) perpetual for kings' liegemen but limited to three generations for the bishops' men. Vanessa King performed a masterful prosopographical analysis and conjectured that Oswald

1101 S 1326 (969 AD).
1102 S 1308 (965 for *c.* 991 AD) and S 1340 (979 AD).
1103 S 1314; S 1300, 1309 (966 AD; Rob 42), S 1322 (969 AD).
1104 S 1381 (996 AD).
1105 Oswald's *compater* Eadric from S 1310, 1334, 1350, and 1366 must be the recipient in S 1324 (969 AD) and S 1358 (988 AD), and over the course of his quarter-of-a-century-long service he received a total of 21.5 *hides* from Oswald. Æthelstan from S 1305 is almost certainly the same person as in S 1331 and S 1343 and his landed wealth comprised 7 *hides*, but if he is also Oswald's brother from S 1308 and S 1340, the number rises to 12 *hides*. Cynehelm, if he is the Cynelm of S 1347, held a total of 14.5 *hides* from Oswald. Æthelric whom Bishop Lyfing leased 2 *hides* in Warwickshire also figures in S 1392 (1038 AD), 1395 (1042 AD), 1396 (1042 AD) with a total of 14 *hides* leased to him for three generations.
1106 For a more in-depth study, see King 1996.

leased parts of his estates in Stratford (Warwicks.) and Itchington and Upton in Tetbury (Gloucs.) to two kin groups, with a possible intent of securing their support for his new ecclesiastical foundations.[1107] Also important to note is that at least one of Oswald's tenants in Gloucestershire, unrelated to them, was a royal *thegn* (LAT. *regis minister*) Ælfwald.[1108] This name is recorded in a good number of King Edgar's diplomas, so separating namesakes is problematic. Vanessa King suggested that Bishop Oswald's Ælfwald may have been the beneficiary of royal grants of Aspley Guise (Beds.)[1109] and Kineton (Warwicks.),[1110] because both diplomas were deposited in the Worcester archive and share similar formulations. If that were the case, Ælfwald's total estate, spread over three shires, was at least 28 *hides*, of which only three were held on lease from Oswald. Another figure of interest is the Bishop's brother Os(w)ulf. This name is attested in royal diplomas of the 950–970s in which he appears as LAT. *miles* and *minister*. From S 652 (958 [for 959] AD) we learn that he was a brother of one Osweard, almost certainly the same person who appears in multiple diplomas of this period. A king's relative of the same name obtained a new diploma for South Stoke (Sussex) to replace one that had burnt.[1111] Because the name Osweard is known in Oswald's family, a chance exists that the Sussex landed proprietor and royal kinsman was Oswald's relative too.[1112]

Most intriguing is the appearance of OE *bōcland* and *lænland* in Oswald's documentation. In vernacular endorsements to S 1347 and S 1367 (? 985 AD), the prelate turns two minor estates (*Caldinccotan* in Bredon [Worcs.] and a messuage with a croft in the town of Worcester), previously leased to his tenants for three generations, into bookland,[1113] and he further "books" two more estates "previously held as loanland" (*he hit ær hæfde to lánlande*, or similar).[1114] At first glance, the situation matches exactly that from the Alfredian *Soliloquies*: a lord first leases out some part of his bookland and then alienates it for good, so that what the lord's client receives is still a bookland even if not obtained directly from a king. But not only does this reading contradict the plain conditions of return in the Latin texts,[1115] it also contradicts the known history of these parcels of land. The four charters under discussion belong to a group that disposed of property out of episcopal endowment as separate from that of the community[1116] and which in *Domesday Book* was in bishop's hands, so they had

1107 King 1996, pp. 105–107.

1108 S 1298 (961 AD).

1109 S 772 (969 AD).

1110 S 773 (969 AD).

1111 "The old charter had been consumed by fire, [so] King Edgar commanded to write this new document for his relative and loyal servant" (*Antiqua cartula incendio consumpta . hanc novitatis scedulam propinquo meo et fideli ministro . Ego Eadgar . Rex rescribere jussi*; S 803 [975 AD]).

1112 King 1996, pp. 108–111.

1113 *…oswold arcebisceop selð cýnelme his þegne to boc londe swa he hit him ær hæfde toforlæten to læn* ('Archbishop Oswald assigns to Cynelm his thegn as bookland as he had earlier leased it to him as loanland'; S 1347); *…ðæt he hæbbe hit swá rúm tó bóclonde swá hé ár hæfde tó lænlonde* ("which he is to have as a bookland as unconditionally as he previously had it as a loanland"; S 1367). See comments by Tinti 2018, p. 319.

1114 S 1334 and S 1350. Note that endorsements to royal leases, too, could describe the grant as "booked", as in S 430, 467, 565 (955 AD; spurious but based on some genuine material), 693 (curiously, though the Latin text clearly states the duration of the lease to three generations, the vernacular endorsement insists on perpetual "booking").

1115 *…ad usum primatis ecclesię* ("...for the use of the head of the Church"; S 1334, 1347, 1350); *…in usum redigatur pontificalem* ("...[it will] return into the use of the pontiff"; S 1367).

1116 Tinti 2018, pp. 310–315. *Cf.* conditions of reversion to the bishop: above, n. 1115. A similar distinction is evident in S 1622. A tempting conjecture is to see the same pontifical land in VI As 1:1, p. 173. In this statute, 'the bishops and reeves who belong to London' stipulated how property of a thief should be

indeed been temporary leases. The status of property in S 1367 is more difficult to cross-check, but the endorsement at the end reads that Bishop Ealdulf reassigned this property as land held in return for services (OE *earnungland*).[1117]

A lot may become clearer on a few mutually intertwined conditions. First, it is worthwhile restating that bookland from the classical tripartite ideal-typical model does not flawlessly match a subset of late Anglo-Saxon tenurial praxes and, effectively, shares many points of convergence with loanland (see VIGNETTE 3). Second, it is attractive to understand late OE *bōcland* as a specifically king-oriented term to refer to potentially the freest lands burdened with some general obligations and in Wessex commonly accompanied by a documentary trail of royal diplomas. Third, a case above has been made that monarchocentric texts regularly apply OE *þegn* to such holders, because historically many royal *thegns* indeed were beneficiaries of royal land patronage. Fourth and finally, note must be made of just how much Bishop Oswald's scribes emulated contemporaneous royal chanceries. The style, language, elements of contents, layout, even script in two extant single sheets[1118] of his leases closely resemble those of royal diplomas. Ideology, too, takes the spirit and phraseology of royal documents: OE *hīrness* gets mention as the prerequisite of the transaction.[1119] It is difficult to descern if Oswald was adapting the socio-legal precedent of royal patronage. However, that he and his scribes were imitating its externally visible attributes begs no question.

It has been suggested, though impossible to prove, that *lǣn* were held without a written agreement and issuing such was what made Oswald's tenants' leased properties booklands, i.e. literally lands held with a charter.[1120] If we discard two charters which expressely call the object of transaction OE *lǣn* in their endorsements,[1121] available documentary evidence would not conflict with the proposition above, although this argument ought not be pushed too far. What also blurred the distinction between Oswald's leases and kings' grants are the conditions of tenure. Lessees enjoyed a free choice of inheritors, something so much desired by the laity, as insisted on by Wormald, and were not exempt from "common burdens" (which is also further known for some of the royal leases).[1122] Another point of convergence emerges in exacted services. A document associated with Bishop Oswald purports to be a letter the prelate sent to King Edgar to explicate the conditions of his leases, here called "riders' law" (LAT. *equitandi lex*). As Vanessa King argues, this memorandum was likely a retrospective attempt to secure the Worcester endowment recorded sometime after

split if the territory on which apprehension happened *bocland sy oðde bisceopa land*. It is, sadly, unclear if OE *oþþe* is syntactically a con- or disjunction in this bit, though. The explanation in *Quadripartitus – id est terra testamentalis uel episcopalis* ("that is, hereditary land or episcopal") – offers little help. And the generic OE *se landhlāford*, who is supposed to share the profits with the prosecutors, instead of the wished-for OE **se bisceop*, weakens this conjecture.

1117 It ought to be noted that this lexeme is extremely rare (merely two occurrences aside from the one just mentioned: S 1531 [1043×1045 AD; *Wills* 31] and Rob 104 [after 1098 AD]) and the exact property relations behind it are opaque.

1118 S 1326 (969 AD; Rob 46) and 1347.

1119 S 1366 and S 1394. It also figures in other leases: S 1281, 1399, 1409. In the latter case, as a prerequisite for future holding.

1120 King 1996, p. 114, and see comments by Tinti 2018, p. 319 (n. 44).

1121 S 1280 and S 1417.

1122 S 430, 467, 526, and 693. There exists a surprisingly apt record in a later Worcester lease by bishop Ealdred that 'at the king's summons' one Wulfgeat, who was leased 1,5 *hides* at Blockley (Gloucs.), must 'discharge the obligations on these 1½ *hides* at the rate of one' (⁊ *hredde he ða oðra healfe hida for are ðreora manna dæg to cinges banne*; S 1409).

1016 AD and before Hemming's cartulary.[1123] The "rider's law" includes dues and renders (church-scot, toll, payment for swine-pasture), services to the bishop (to lend horses and ride on errands, build bridges, burn lime, make deer-hedges for hunting, send hunting spears), unconditioned fealty and obedience to the bishop, but also expects the lessees

> [...] to meet the many other wants of the bishop, to fulfil the service due to him or that due to the king [...] on account of the benefice which is leased to them, according to his command and the amount of land which each possesses.[1124]

It stands to reason that Bishop Oswald's lease series exhibits a direct cultural mimesis. Simply put, Oswald's draftsmen emulated the royal language of lordship and land patronage, Accordingly, they imitatively called some of his tenants his *thegns* and some of their holdings bookland. For Oswald and his team, they were his *thegns* inasmuch as they held (temporarily) hereditable lands that came with a charter which closely resembled a royal diploma and on similar conditions – proportionate service in royal host among them. A contributing factor to this mimesis may have been the presence of actual royal *thegns* among Oswald's tenants, two of which were his brothers. In fact, kings did sublet land as well and used regular diplomatic forms to this end, although how widespread royal lease was is hard to gauge.[1125] Therefore, maybe Oswald's beneficiaries approached their royal counterparts as more than just aspirants.

Bishop Oswald's lease sequence is unique in continuity and numbers. Outside the Worcester archive there have been preserved only 24 ecclesiastical leases, almost half of them in Winchester.[1126] Given that Oswald also later held the archbishopric of York, one could expect a theoretically similar leasing activity in the North, but the lack of a cartularist like the one responsible for *Liber Wigorniensis* could have caused loss of any such documentation, if it ever existed.[1127] But with that, one tendency transpires. In the literary

1123 King 1996, pp. 113–116. It and the overall context of landholdings of the Worcester diocese, including the bishops' leases, have been summarised by Wareham 2023, pp. 29–35.

1124 *…ad multas alias indigentiæ causas quibus opus est domino antistiti sepe frunisci sine ad suum servitium sive ad regale explendum* […] *propter beneficium quod illis prestitum est cum omni humilitate et subjectione subditi fiant . secundum ipsius voluntatem et terrarum quas quisque possidet quantitatem* (S 1368; translation from no. 163 in Brown 1984, pp. 134–135). *Cf.* above, n. 1122, and the circumstantiation that service is to be proportional to the size of the holding.

1125 Our knowledge of ubiquity of this practice is seriously hampered by the paucity of available records. Indirect evidence suggests that subletting land could have been more widespread than what direct evidence reveals – see discussions by Abels 1988, pp. 149–151; Williams 2008, p. 77; and especially by Baxter and Blair 2006. For the period on hand, the pool of royal lease documentation is limited to S 218 (883 AD; disputed authenticity; *SEHD* 12), 356 (871×899 AD; some later contamination possible), 385 (*c.* 909 AD), 430 (935 AD), 467, 526 (947 AD; probably authentic), 693 (961 AD; probably authentic), 1458 (*c.* 995 AD; Rob 41), 905 (1003, *recte* 1002 AD). For possible evidence of royal temporary leases as early as in King Ine's reign, see Pratt 2013, pp. 22–26. The Canterbury single-sheet S 128 (788 AD) could be another lease (or some intermediary form) from a king to his *minister*, because the donor grants the land to the *minister* and his wife and 'if it so happens that a son or daughter be born to you' (*si contigerit ut u*[*obi*]*s filius aut filia nati fuerint*). Presumably, if the grantees stayed childless, the grant had to revert to the king.

1126 One in Bury St Edmunds (S 1224 [*c.* 1040 AD]), Hereford (S 1270 [840×852 AD]), Exeter (previously Crediton; S 1387 [1016×1020 AD]), Bath (S 1426), Sherborne (S 1422), Gloucester (S 1424 [1022 AD]), Evesham (S 1423 [1016×1023 AD; Rob 81]), St Albans (S 1425), Peterborough (S 1412 [786×796 AD]) each; two in New Minster (S 1417 and S 1420 [995×1005 AD; Rob 70]) and eleven in Old Minster at Winchester (S 693b [Rob 33], 1274 [871×877 AD], 1275 [871×877 AD], S 1283 [899×904 AD; Rob 16], 1285 [902 AD; Rob 14], 1287 [879×908 AD; Rob 15], 1391, 1402 [1047×1057 AD; Rob 106], 1403, 1444, 1476 [*c.* 1053 AD; Rob 114]); and two in Christ Church Canterbury (S 1288 and S 1390 [1020×1038 AD] – *cf.* S 1464 and S 1466.

1127 Tinti 2018, p. 305 (n. 4). Andrew Rabin (correctly, in my non-specialist in codicology opinion) surmises that *Liber Wigorniensis* was commissioned by (then) Bishop Wulfstan 'as a means of ensuring that leased

dimension, Alfredian translators of Bede and Pope Gregory, as well as their contemporary hagiographer of St Guthlac, applied OE *þegn* to individual members of bishops' retinues. Yet of the 19 leases from before Oswald's pontificate, including those in Worcester own records, none is from an ecclesiastic hierarch to a *minister* or *thegn*. Conversely, after Oswald's time in office, Archbishop of Canterbury Æthelnoth (in office 1020–1038) and another Worcester bishop, Ealdred (in office ? 1044–1062, later also bishop of Ramsbury, Hereford, and archbishop of York), did lend estates to *ministri*.[1128] And the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, as already mentioned, notes the death of a bishop's *thegn* under 1001 AD (above, n. 499). All in all, we are more likely to be witnessing some actual trend towards a mimesis of royal praxes than an arbitrary chronological coincidence.

Open remains the question to which extent Worcester praxes got replicated across the country. There exist four pre-Conquest royal writs by which monarchs granted (OE [*ge-*] *unnan*) two religious communities – Christ Church and St Augustines, Canterbury – to have sake and soke and other legal-fiscal rights over an undisclosed number of *thegns*.[1129] Because in his charters Bishop Oswald almost invariably called upon royal and ealdormanic permission, it is tempting to see these writs in the same light.

But on balance, a different legal and property transaction may underlie them. We do not know how often and since when kings sublet individual parcels of their larger manorial complexes, but there are reasons to think that at least some of such tenants were called kings' *thegns*. In his discussion of the Mersham–*Wassingwell* exchange in 858 AD (above, p. 118), John Blair demonstrates that the *thegn* Wul(f)laf seem to have consolidated his holdings, now composed of some folkland and bookland, all within the royal estate at Wye.[1130] Ryan Lavelle similarly pointed out in three case studies from King Eadwig's reign how some lands "booked" to *thegns* lay adjacent to royal estates known from *Domesday Book*, and the Crown seems to have maintained some interest in and control over these grants.[1131] There further exist two interesting independent items indicative of that when giving out land to the Church, kings could encroach on their *thegns*' property rights if they happened to be in the way. One is a problematic donation by King Æthelstan to the Milton Abbey. Besides some 114.5 *hides* across three shires, the document purports that the king gave the brethren '3 thegns in Sussex and a salthouse by the weir'.[1132] Nothing else is stated, so exactly what this phrase is supposed to mean is unclear, and sadly, the provenance of this charter is so dubious that '[t]he possibility remains that the whole thing is a fabrication'.[1133] The other document is a reliable writ of Queen Ælfthryth (*c.* 945–1000/1001).[1134] It narrates how in King Edgar's reign the royal estate of Taunton was granted to the Winchester diocese;[1135]

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ecclesiastical property would revert to the Church when current tenancy agreements ended' (Rabin 2015, p. 13).

1128 S 1390 and 1405 (1058 AD).

1129 S 986, 1088, 1089, 1091. The Christ Church privileges were subsequently confirmed by Norman kings (Bates, *RRAN* 66 [1070×1087 AD]); Davis, *RRAN* 336, 840; Vinogradoff 1908, p. 3 [n. 1]) in updated Middle English and closely reproducing the original Old English privilege. These writs seem to illustrate II Cn 12, p. 316, in which Wulfstan reserves for the king the right to grant his exclusive regal legal-fiscal prerogatives at his monarchical discretion.

1130 Blair 2020, pp. 210–211.

1131 Lavelle 2010, p. 31–34.

1132 *…and preo ðegne on Suþsexan . and salterne by were* (S 391 [843 for 934 AD]; Rob 23).

1133 Robertson 1956, p. 301.

1134 S 1242 (995×1002 AD; *Writs* 108).

1135 S 806, 818, and 825 (963×975 AD), but the authenticity is not beyond doubt in all three.

the king commanded 'every one of his thegns who had any land on the estate' (*ælcon his þegna þe enig land on þan lande hafde*) to either agree to terms offered by Bishop Æthelwold or else give up their possessions.[1136] One Leofric probably wanted neither and so his wife Wulfgyth appealed to Queen Ælfthryth. Together with Leofric's sister Ælfswith, who also was Ælfthryth's relative, the queen negotiated a lifelong interest in the estate for the couple as tenants.[1137] Leofric received a copy of 'a new title-deed' (*Leofric hafde áne niwe boc*), but three decades later accusations (most likely by the dispossessed heirs) were brought forward that Leofric had been forced to give up an older written agreement (with the king, one supposes).[1138]

A *minister* Leofric allegedly received woodland at Claydons in Alveston (Warwicks.) from King Edgar,[1139] but the document is of imperfect authenticity. The same Leofric also likely witnessed his diplomas for ten more years[1140] and then probably once King Edward the Martyr's.[1141] If S 779 is authentic, this Leofric attended a royal meeting in Woolmer (Hants.), so it is not unthinkable that he could have held land in Taunton at roughly the same distance from Alveston.[1142] But aside from the name, there is not much else on which to base this identification. Wulfgyth is not a frequent Anglo-Saxon name. One woman of this name commended herself to the New Minster in Winchester and was the mother of one Ælfgar, who might be a prominent *minister* in royal attendance in the 980s.[1143] For Ælfswith, three potential candidates offer themselves for identification: one received a land gift from King Eadwig in Somerset in 956 AD;[1144] another, a widow and nun, received a similar grant from King Edgar in Wiltshire in 970 AD;[1145] the third got another grant from the same king in Somerset at an unspecified date.[1146] None of these identifications is, regretfully, certain. It might as well turn out that S 1242 is the only evidence to Leofric and his influential female relatives' existence.

To round up the question of *thegnly* land lease and the impression the language of royal lordship and patronage left on Old English as a whole, we need to pay heed to the Wulfs-

1136 A similar statement is recorded in the vernacular section of the non-problem-free confirmation by King Edgar of his grandfather's alleged grant of Taunton: the king 'granted that both noblemen and commoners on the manor of God should be entitled to the same dues as his own men are on his own royal manors' (*geuþe þ*[*æt*] *ægþer ge twelfhynde men ge twyhynde weron on þam Godes hame þara ylcan gerihta wyrþe þe his agene men sindon on his agenum cynehamum*; S 806). Three post-Conquest surveys have survived to provide some ideas about manorial customs at Taunton some 100–120 years after the events narrated in Queen Ælfthryth's writ (Abels 1988, pp. 157–158). Leases in Taunton from bishop Esne (diocese unknown, mentioned only in King Alfred's will) to three of his relatives are also recorded in S 1819 but are hard to date (Turner 1953, pp. 118–126). Bishop Ælfsige of Winchester (in office 951–958, later Archbishop of Canterbury) bequeathed to the king his land at Taunton that King Eadwig had lent him (S 1491 [955×958 AD; *Wills* 4]).

1137 This solution was not atypical, because contemporaneous records exist of similar arrangements between laity and the Church: e.g., S 1456 and S 1468 (1043×1044 AD; Rob 97).

1138 The case is discussed by Rabin 2008, pp. 46–48.

1139 S 833 (962 AD; likely spurious).

1140 S 705 (962 AD), 725 (964 AD), 779, 781 (970 AD), 786 (972 AD; disputed authenticity). He can also turn out to be the Leofric from S 1215 (968 AD).

1141 S 831 (977 AD).

1142 To compare, in 942 AD, Ealdorman Æthelstan "Half-King" obtained 20 *hides* at Mells (Soms.) and ten at *Ærmundeslea* and a vill at Appleton (Berks.) (S 480 and S 481), roughly the same distance apart as Leofric's suggested items of property in Warwickshire and Somerset.

1143 Keynes 1996, p. 95.

1144 S 593.

1145 S 775.

1146 S 1762. The charter is known only from a summary in the now lost Glastonbury manuscript *Liber Terrarum*, so no further details are presently available.

tanesque *Rectitudines*. This is a multi-authored pre-Conquest 11th-century text of a contested provenance under likely influence of Wulfstan's schematics of social order[1147] and written in standard late West Saxon. The *Rectitudines* explains that a "law of *thegn*" (OE *þegenlagu*, a *hapax legomenon*) consists of 'obligations of his charter' (OE *bōcriht*, explained as the "common burdens") and various 'additional property obligations' (*mare landriht*),

> [...] such as maintaining the animal hedge for the royal estate, provisioning a ship for defense, service in the coastguard, the royal guard, and the military watch, and the rendering of alms, Church dues [= church-scot], and many other various things. [my emphasis][1148]

The overall resemblance with Worcester leases is indismissable: Oswald and *Rectitudines*' *thegns* hold their lands with charters and acquit them by performing military[1149] and some other services in common, though the last-mentioned seem less prestigious for the bishop's tenants and a better match to what the *Rectitudines* assigns to a *geneāt*'s obligations.[1150] These parallels suggest that the *thegn* in the *Rectitudines* is a (notionally) temporary tenant rather than a (notionally) perpetual proprietor, and contextualisation above evinces plausibility of such interpretation. Because some of Oswald's select tenants found themselves witnessing royal diplomas, or even connected to the king, and because Leofric of Taunton enjoyed mediated kinsmanship with royalty, nothing contradicts the main conclusion of this section, to which we now proceed.

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To end where §3.4.4 began, by all accounts, when King Edgar's legal advisors drafted the Andover code in the 960s, there had established a firm trilateral semiotic bond (above, p. 32) between OE *þegn*, the concept of a landholder, and the freest tenurial forms in the country. The first hint at the nascent lexical-conceptual connexion between OE *þegn* and the most privileged landed proprietors is first registered in King Edmund's Colyton laws. It is likewise clear that their land tenures occupied the top segment on a spectrum of freedom from liability on land, and that this segment was internally variable – perpetual holdings,

1147 Rabin 2020, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv, in his latest to date commentary expressed reservations and allowed for stylistic coincidences. However, his earlier Wulfstan's biography (Rabin 2015, p. 13) presents a plausible historical connexion to the Archbishop who engaged himself in his northern see's ecclesiastical property management. Even if the *Rectitudines* were not written by Wulfstan's hand, it certainly is permeated by his attitudes and drive for regularity.

1148 *…swilce is deorhege to cyniges hame and scorp to friðscipe and sæweard and heafodweard and fyrdweard, ælmesfeoh and cyricsceat and mænige oðere mistlice ðingc* (Rect 1:1, p. 444).

1149 Lund 1996, p. 55, particularly emphasised that when by S 986 King Cnut granted the archbishop fiscal and legal rights 'over as many thegns as I have assigned him' (*ofer swa feala þegna swa ic him to lætan hæbbe*), the king was pursuing military needs, i.e. that *thegns* in this instance are to be understood as a military contingent sent by the hierarch to acquit his quota. His interpretation fits in quite organically in the overall argument above.

1150 To 'give a pig for the use of the pasture each year, and ride and act as his lord's messenger', 'trim the animal hedge', 'pay Church dues and alms', and 'carry out errands both far and near or to wherever he is instructed to go' (*…syllan* […] *gærsswyn on geare and ridan and averian* […] *deorhege heawan* […] *cyricsceat syllan and ælmesfeoh* […] *ærendian fyr swa nyr, swa hwyder swa him mon to tæcð*; Rect 2, p. 445). Because some of the dues are common with the "law of *thegn*", it is not exactly possible to identify Oswald's "riders" with either *thegns* or *geneātas* of the *Rectitudines*. Most plausibly, these "riders" were a group known in *Domesday Book* as "radcnihts" (LAT. *radchenistri*) or "radmenn" (LAT. *radmanni*), also confined to the western counties (Circuit 5). Because they somestimes were explained as "free men" (LAT. *liberi homines*), it seems futile to put them in a separate category (Kristensen 1975, pp. 67–68), though it has recently been plausibly suggested that these "riding men" were engaged in borderland administration (Ray 2022, pp. 141–145) – *cf. drengs* in Northern England (see VIGNETTE 2).

long-term but eventually (theoretically) revertible leases, tenures conveyed by charters and those without a parchment trail. In Wessex, they could be described as booklands; outside it, other verbal descriptions applied too. Common to all such properties was heritability and the most possible freedom of disposition which had to be acquitted by proportional royal military service (including infrastructure maintenance) and some other imposts in kind or commuted into money.

A complex question remains regarding the degree to which such notions led to a creation of a new historical ontology, in Ian Hacking's terms. To polemicise: §§3.3.13 and 3.4.4 illustrate the late Cerdicings could have notionally considered all secular landowning elite(s) in their dominion their *thegns* in a top-down manner; we may even concede that some, perhaps many of its members could see themselves in this way when dealing with kings – for example, when hearing a monarchical address "to all his *thegns* in such-and-such shire" or when reporting back (above, pp. 134–135). But a whole different matter is, in methodological terms proposed in §1.6, how much of a social group outside this discourse *thegns* were. The next section will therefore address the research sub-question in Question 2 of *thegns*' embeddedness in social networks and their social behaviour.

3.4.5 Social "Thegnship"

Due to the limited available sources, understanding how Anglo-Saxon elites absorbed royal discourse typically requires using inductive reasoning. Perhaps, the most apt material on the question are miscellaneous Anglo-Saxon charters that frequently employ the "good people" expressions that can take aboard OE *þegn* among other synonyms. Their evidence, on a closer look, may be fraught with influence from the royal chancery. A great deal of them open with a distinct formula, "Here it is declared in this document how/that..." (OE *Hēr is* [*ge*]*swutelaþ*[1151] *on þissum* [*ge*]*writ hū/þæt*…). In its complete composition, this formula first appears in King Edgar's *Wihtbordesstan* edict.[1152] Given the instructions in the edict to multiply and circulate it in affected areas,[1153] it is not unreasonable that this formula was learnt from royal documentation. By the same token, styling witnesses as *thegns* could have been similarly inherited from the royal chancery. Similar arguments can be made for two other contemporaneous and seemingly dependable texts, the already cited *Ordinance Concerning the* Dunsæte and the so-called *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge*.[1154] The former exhibits familiarity with preceding royal legislation, such as calling on five compurgators' oaths, double fines and *wergild* payments by a wrongdoer, and, interestingly, property forfeiture by collective judges (OE *lahmenn*) for unjust verdicts revokable only

1151 Rarely replaced by OE *cȳþ*.

1152 *Her is geswutelod on þisum gewrite, hu Eadgar cyncg wæs smeagende*… ('Notification is hereby given in this order, that King Eadgar has been considering...'; IV Eg Prologue, p. 206). The only earlier embryo of this opening formula should be S 1504 (*Her geswutelad þæt*…). However, first, it appears in an abbreviated form, second, this opening phrase may have initially been a later endorsement (*cf.* S 1533 [931 or 933×939 AD]; Rob 26) copied by the Winchester scribe of *Codex Wintoniensis* as part of the text, because the next phrase begins with a direct address to the king, third, the last-mentioned circumstance still indicates a royal discourse.

1153 IV Eg 15:1, p. 214.

1154 The text resists any chronological dating more precise than its script, *c.* 970×999 AD. The regulation has been preserved in a single leaf of a gospel-book, probably from Ely (Gneuss and Lapidge 2014, pp. 36, 299). The latest discussions available at the moment this book was being prepared were by Gautier 2008 (esp. pp. 355–361) and Naismith 2020, pp. 642–656. For comparison with later Scandinavian guilds, see Haugland 2012. I would like to thank Anne Irene Riisøy for mentioning this work to me.

by a purgatory oath "that they knew no better" (*þæt hi bet ne cuðon*).[1155] The latter text is a valuable testimony to how OE *þegn* had by the later decades of the 10th century grown synonymous with the expression "eldest people", because the first time the last-mentioned are recorded as historical figures, they get identified through an urban nodal point, Bedford, to which they "belonged" (OE *hȳrdon*).[1156] But though the *Regulation* seems independent of royal legislation in contents, it too opens with a variant of the characteristic "Here it is declared" formula.[1157]

But even so, we should probably not see these textual interactions as unilateral. It would appear, they were leastwise to some extent conditioned by a self-reinforcing feedback loop.

3.4.5.1 *thegns* in the diachrony of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, commissioned by King Alfred and then continued relatively synchronically with the narrated events, is doubtless a very king-oriented and king-sponsored textual family.[1158] Yet its language is anything but a closed system – the continuation of the Peterborough redaction, for instance, organically slides into early Middle English. By its very design, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is an 'engaged historiography' whose

> [...] texts evolved: sometimes dramatically and radically, sometimes more subtlely and organically, though nonetheless significantly.[1159]

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* exhibits awareness on the part of the authors about changing socio-political circumstances. A prime example would be the use of OE *eorl*. The already polysemic nature of this word was further complicated by the introduction of a full cognate, ON *jarl*, during the "First Viking Age". OE *eorl* first enters the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 871 AD.[1160] But until 1023 AD the chroniclers use it very consciously only in reference to Scandinavian leaders below a kingly rank,[1161] whereas "Saxon" governors of equal status are invariably called OE *ealdormenn*. After casualties of the Danish Conquest, in King Cnut's reign the top echelons of Anglo-Saxon ruling elite were replenished with a Scandinavian cadre, which led to a lexical-conceptual merger of OE *eorl* and *ealdormann*, duly reflected in

1155 Molyneaux 2011, pp. 259–261.

1156 *ASC*: 914 (MS A)/915 AD (MSS C, D). It would seem that a town functioned as a nodal focal point for a larger territory defined through it (which is duly reflected in some non-West Saxon names of shires). Alban Gautier, for example, overtly (and correctly, in my opinion) treats the "*thegns* of Cambridge" as "*thegns* of Cambridgeshire".

1157 *Her is on þis gewrite siu geswitelung þære gerædnisse þe þius geferræden geræd hæfþ on þegna gilde on Grantabrycge* ('Here in this writing is the declaration of the enactment which this fellowship has determined in the thegns' guild in Cambridge'; Cambridge Guild Regulation, p. 610). Vinogradoff 1908, p. 12, saw the Cambridge guild's 'best counterpart in the guilds of St. Olaf in Norway, and other organizations of the same kind', referring to two guilds of St Óláfr: one in Sunnhordland (for localisation, see Haugland 2012, p. 43 [n. 3]) from the second half of the 13th century, the other in Onarheim (both were edited and translated into modern German in the *Appendix* by Pappenheim 1888, pp. 145–167). It can be argued, the resemblance is rather generic and dictated by the common social sphere of application, so that no immediate influence is perceivable. On medieval guilds more generally, see Reynolds 1997, chap 3.

1158 Beside Nicholas Brooks's already cited article, the same author drives home the argument that a name more reflective of the source's contents is in fact "royal annals" (Brooks 2012).

1159 Stafford 2020, p. 17.

1160 *ASC*: 871 (MSS A, B, D, E, F)/872 AD (MS C). The annal for 777 AD in the Peterborough redaction, that too includes OE *eorl*, is an interpolation made soon after 1121 AD (Muir and Sparks 2023, I, p. 8).

1161 The same is true for the few diplomas to use this vernacular title instead of Latin renditions: S 404 (930 AD), 544 (949 AD), 552a.

the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[1162] The annals can therefore find use as an imperfect but nevertheless at least partially serviceable diachronic touchstone of sorts.

OE *þegn* appears in 27 single annals across six manuscripts that have been collected and collated in Appendix 3.2.[1163] with a sad gap in the transformative middle decades of the 10th century (917–988 AD), these annals divide themselves into the following clusters:

1. A stray single mention *s.a.* 461/465 AD, probably an attempt of a folk-etymology of a toponym *Wippedesfleot* (lit. Wipped's creek) as derived from a name of a fallen king's *thegn*.
2. Two interpolations in the Peterborough version: *s.aa.* 626 (from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*) and 656 AD (a supposed royal diploma).
3. The Cyneheard and Cynewulf "saga" *s.a.* 755 AD.
4. Seven mentions in the account of King Alfred's repulsion of the "great heathen army" and his children's later push-back into the "Danelaw": *s.aa.* 871, 874, 893, 895, 896, 904, 917 AD.
5. Five mentions in the so-called "Æthelredian annals" (983–1016 AD): *s.aa.* 988, 1001, 1010, 1013, 1015 AD.[1164]
6. Two mentions in King Cnut's reign and its immediate aftermath: *s.aa.* 1028 and 1036 AD. The former may, in fact, be an interpolation in the bilingual Canterbury version (manuscript F), because it does not appear in any other redaction, though is not out of context (the king leads fifty ships "of English *thegns*" into Norway to battle King Óláfr Haraldsson; see also below, p. 357).
7. Four mentions during King Edward the Confessor's reign and the Norman Conquest: *s.aa.* 1051, 1052, 1065, 1067 AD.
8. Four mentions in the Peterborough continuation in the Anglo-Norman times: *s.aa.* 1086, 1123, 1124, 1127 AD.

In this sequence, there is a very pronounced change in how *thegns* are reported between 988 and 1067 AD. Before and after, they are people in royal service. Further, before 988 AD, a *genetivus possessivus* invariably preceded OE *þegn*, and *thegns* invariably engage in the Mitteisian *comitatus* activities as warriors in personal capacities or military leaders on kings' behalf. After 1067 AD, *thegns* again appear in conjunction with kingship, even if they are not always subservient to it as before. Two annals pair OE *þegn* with *genetivus possessivus* (*s.aa.* 1123 and 1124 AD) in which *thegns* are commanded by the king and hold councils. One places them in a secular power hierarchy between earls and knights (OE *cnihtas*) when describing how 'all the powerful men over all England' (*ealle þa rice men ofer eall Englaland*) attended King William I's assemblies during his visits to England (*s.a.* 1086 AD). The other is in a similar vein when King Henry I convenes 'all the chief men, both clerics and laymen, that there were in England' (*eall ða heaued, læred ⁊ læuued, þet wæs on Engleland*) to have them swear fealty to his heir Matilda (*s.a.* 1127 AD). But the years 988–1067 AD stand out the most. In them, save the dubious annal of 1028 AD, *thegns* act independently of kings, sometimes

1162 Banton 1981, pp. 5–8. *Cf.* a philological approach by Pons-Sanz 2007a, pp. 176–181.

1163 Not included here is William Lambarde and Laurence Nowell's transcript (manuscript G; BL, MS Cotton Otho B. xi), itself a copy of the Winchester redaction (Stafford 2020, pp. 169–174).

1164 On their ascription to Archbishop Wulfstan and his other tampering with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, see above, n. 37.

against incumbent monarchs,[1165] and if they get any lexical definition, it is done not via *genetivus possessivus*[1166] but through a locality to which they belong: Devonshire, Somerset, Cambridgeshire, the "West", the "Five Boroughs", "north of the Thames", Yorkshire (and Northumberland). This chronological span conspicuously coincides with when OE *þegn* suddenly appears in the local "good-people" formulae, *c.* 990×1055 AD (Table 2), with potential extensions to as early as the 970s and as late as the 1060s,[1167] and in "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formula, *c.* 990×1020 AD (Table 1).

By and large and with due appreciation of OE *þegn*'s otherwise lexical evolution elucidated in §3.3, the abductive conclusion from the diachronic appearance of OE *þegn* in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* must be that the language of royal ideology did not fall on deaf ears and must have somehow affected wider strata. Between King Æthelred's early reign and the Norman Conquest, in sociolinguistic registers informed by preceding influence from Wessex over a few consecutive decades and perhaps emulating its language as a hallmark of prestige, at least some regional Anglo-Saxon aristocratic elites probably tolerated the concept of *thegnship*. For what it is worth, we may be dealing with what Ian Hacking termed a "looping effect" (above, n. 159).

3.4.5.2 "honorary freemen"

Two leitmotifs permeate textual situations in which such elites are recorded. One is not as universal though still rather pronounced, especially on concession that various synonyms in the "good people" formulae could in practice denote the same individuals. More often than not, *thegns* act on behalf of a community and get defined through it. Communities they represent can be of variable scale, from hundred/wapentakes to supraregions, though extreme cases for *thegns* proper are fewer[1168] with the preponderant majority concentrated on the shire level.[1169] This latter fact even got a linguistic expression in the coinage of a rare compound, OE *scīrþegnas* (lit. shire *thegns*).[1170] The other is an outstanding unanimity in the roles *thegns* play in these communities. As observed by Bougard and colleagues, elites commonly fulfil the task of public administration and governance (above, p. 25). The concrete known functions *thegns* are recorded to have executed at various moments in time can be summarised thus:

1165 1013 AD: Ealdorman Leofric and the "western *thegns*" capitulate to Sveinn Tjúguskegg shortly before he is pronounced king, after which King Æthelred chooses to flee the country for Normandy; 1051 AD: *thegns* for a while support Earl Godwine's family against King Edward; 1065 AD: wayward Yorkshire *thegns* rebel against Earl Tósti (*c.* 1029–1066), King Edward's appointee, ransack his residence, kill his housecarls, outlaw him, and select a new earl.

1166 Except *s.a.* 1001 AD in MS A, an account of a bishop's *thegn*.

1167 S 1216 and S 1234 (1052×1066 or 1070, possible 1054 AD), in both of which *thegns* appear as witnesses without adjectival qualifiers.

1168 I Atr 1:2, p. 216; III Atr 3:1, p. 228; Northu 57:2, p. 384; *DB* I, fol. 376b (LIN CW11) for *thegns* on the hundredal level; *ASC*: 1013 and 1015 AD (MSS C, D, E, F), 1036 AD (MSS E, F), S 939 for *thegns* on suprar-egional level ("western *thegns*", [two] "elder *thegns*" of the "Five Boroughs", "*thegns* north of the Thames", "West Saxon and Mercian *thegns*", accordingly).

1169 S 1394, 1399, 1402, 1403, 1406, 1409, 1422, 1427 (1061×1082, possibly 1061×1066 AD), 1456, 1469 (1043×1046 AD), 1530 (1042×1043 AD), Bates, *RRAN* 276 (1070×April 1072 AD); *ASC*: 988 AD (MSS C, D, E), 1010 AD (MSS C, D, F), 1052 and 1065 AD (MSS C, D); *DB* I, fols. 69a (WIL 23,7), 70c (WIL 26,19), 71b (WIL 28,10), 280c (NTT S2–4), 298 (YKS C40) and potentially 179b (HEF A3).

1170 S 1402, 1403, 1476.

- to stand witnesses in land transactions,[1171] wills,[1172] marriage agreements,[1173] legal disputes;[1174]
- to act as select and/or collective judges;[1175]
- to produce testimony regarding local landed property;[1176]
- to collect "Peter's pence";[1177]
- to act as compurgators: in pairs if a lord wanted to sustain legal integrity of his man of ill-repute;[1178] in fives if a lord needed to cleanse themselves of accusations of instigating their men to flee upon a misdeed;[1179] in groups of 48 when cleansing someone accused of corpse robbery;[1180]
- to fight for their community;[1181]
- to make political decisions of, effectively, nation-wide scale.[1182]

If, for the sake of the argument, we equate "(good) *thegns*" with all other English "good people", including Latin and post-Conquest texts, qualitatively the list widens to incorporate:

- witnessing manumissions,[1183]
- apprehending absentees from public assemblies and confiscating persistent absentees' property;[1184]
- acting as various sureties.[1185]

A linguistic argument can further stand scrutiny that *thegns* also fulfilled the role of appointed regular public witnesses charged with vouching to warranty, first of all in cattle trade, but later of a more general scope. Royal legislation, especially since King Æthelstan, is full of articles aimed at preventing potential public agitation in such transactions.[1186] That *thegns* acted in such capacities is suggested by the frequent description of such warrantors as "trustworthy" (OE [*ge*]*treōw*, *wel getreōw*, *fullgetreōw*) and the use of OE *gewitnes*. Mutual

1171 S 1394, 1399, 1402, 1403, 1406, 1409, 1422, 1469.
1172 S 1530.
1173 S 1461.
1174 S 1454.
1175 III Atr 3:1, p. 228, S 1462 and S 1456. In the latter case, the king first gave orders to 'his thegns in East Kent and West Kent' (*hys þegenas on East Cent ⁊ on West Cent*) but at the actual hearing convened 'the thegns both of East Kent and West Kent—all the leading men' (*þegenas ægþer ge of East Cent ge of West Cent, eal seo duguð*). It is thus a prime specimen when either the royal chancery was given a carte blanche to freely include and omit *genetivus possessivus* before king's *thegns*, or the king felt at liberty to understand local elites as his *thegns* and command them accordingly.
1176 *DB* I, fols. 69a (WIL 23,7), 70c (WIL 26,19), 71b (WIL 28,10). To them must be added *DB* I, fols. 66c (WIL 7,15), 69d (WIL 24,42), 74d (WIL 68,23), 102c (DEV 3,32). In these four latter cases, the local level – hundredal or provincial – gets no explicit indication.
1177 Northu 57:2, p. 384.
1178 I Atr 1:2, p. 216.
1179 I Atr 1:8, p. 218.
1180 *Walreaf*, a stray legal one-liner of uncertain provenance, but potentially a misplaced clause from the Wantage law-code (Wormald 1999, pp. 320–323, 371–372). See also Sukhino-Khomenko 2021b, pp. 211–214.
1181 *ASC*: 1010 (MSS C, D, F) and 1052 AD (MSS C, D).
1182 *ASC*: 1013 (MSS C, D, E, F) and 1036 AD (MSS E, F).
1183 Nos. 30, 31, 33 in Föster 1930, pp. 77–99, all dated between *c.* 960 AD and the late 11th century.
1184 II As 20:1–4, p. 160.
1185 ECf 20:3, 24–24:1, 38:2, pp. 178, 180–182, 200.
1186 VI As 10, pp. 181–182; I Eg 4, p. 192; I Atr 4, p. 220; III Atr 9, p. 230; V Atr 32:2, p. 244; II Cn 22–24, 30, 33, pp. 324–326, 330, 336. See detailed discussion by Lambert 2017, pp. 99–102, 149–156, 172–181, 268–274. A recent study examines what seems to be an analogous institute in later medieval France: McHaffie 2023.

exchangeability of OE *getreōw mann* and OE *getreōw þegn* is confirmed in a number of related texts,[1187] and documents often end with a stock statement that they were ratified (OE *on gewitnese* + gen. noun, lit. with cognisance of) by "many" or "all the (eldest) *thegns*" of a shire. The evidence is admittedly somewhat slight and of a purely lexical nature, and so pushing it too far may exceed the sources' testimony.

In short, when they are local elites, *thegns* appear to be people vested with a collective public authority incumbent on public trust and respect they command, itself arising from social connectedness and a good knowledge of local affairs. For simplicity's sake and by a modern analogy, one may call them a social group of "honourable freemen" in a wide sense.[1188] In this light, *thegnliness* in Wulfstan's homiletic lament on the moral decadence of his contemporaries and in a Herefordshire widow's appeal to judges invite a very concrete social reading: "good" *thegns* uphold good social order in their localities and collectives.[1189]

3.4.5.3 profundity of dissemination and geographical extent

Geographical aspects of *thegnly* elites have been entered on the list of research sub-questions of QUESTION 2 for this study. In §3.4.3, these aspects have been approached in relation to kings' *thegns*. The section below will turn to a broader stratum.

Idiosyncratic sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *Ordinance Concerning the* Dunsæte or *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge* give only so many qualitative insights into the internalisation of *thegnship* by social groups of local elites. To gauge the quantitative aspect of this process one ought to turn to mass sources. For obvious monarchocentrism and skewed distribution across the country, royal diplomas cannot serve this purpose. The only material left for us is thus *Domesday Book*.

Various Latinisations of OE *þegn* (e.g., LAT. *tainus*, *tagnus*, *teignus*, etc.) appear almost a thousand (!) times[1190] throughout the Domesday text. These could be divided into four uneven groups based on their lexical surrounding and introduction:

1. *thegns* of King Edward (hereafter "*taini regis Edwardi*"),
2. *thegns* of the king (hereafter "*taini regis*"),
3. *thegns* of lords other than the king (hereafter "*taini* of other lords"),
4. *thegns* with no further qualifications (hereafter "generic *taini*").

The 15 individuals in Group 2, on closer inspection, must be united with Group 1. Not only are they exceptionally few, but the LAT. expression "X, *tainus regis*" is almost exclu-

1187 I Atr 1:2, p. 216, reads 'two trustworthy thegns' (*twegen getreowe þegenas*) where III Atr 4, p. 228, reads 'with two good thegns' (*mid twam godum þegenum*) and Wulfstan recycled and merged the two in II Cn 30:1, pp. 330–332, as 'two trustworthy men' (*twegen getrywe men*). Later, 'two trustworthy thanes and one priest in each wapentake' (*on ælcon wæpengetace triwe þegnas and ænne mæssepreost*) are responsible for collecting "Peter's pence" in Northumbria (Yorkshire?) (Northu 57:2, p. 384). I Atr 1:2, 1:8, p. 218, read 'five thegns' (*fif þegnas* and *mid fif þegnum*, accordingly), but Wulfstan once more reads 'five trustworthy men' (*fif getreowe men*) in II Cn 30:6, p. 334, and Duns 1:2, p. 374, for a somewhat similar situation of proving legal possession of cattle reads that the accused will be one of the "six appointed who are trustworthy" (*syxa sum ungecorenra, þe getrywe syn*).

1188 Vinogradoff 1908, p. 97, suggested a close alternative: 'county families of later days'; Simon Keynes prefers a metaphor, 'the very fabric of social and political order' (WBEASE, p. 460).

1189 For broader functioning of provincial communities, see Reynolds 1997, pp. 243–248. On the Anglo-Saxon local example, see Wareham 2005, pp. 29–45.

1190 The dataset included 906 references to *thegns* (including Exon Domesday but not other "satellites") as actual individuals and 30 in various general passages, such as customs. I disavow, however, any claim that these numbers are final and concede possible minor lapses in counting.

sively confined to Circuit 7,[1191] so dropping *Edwardi* must have been a scribal preference rather than a meaningful distinction. A fifth group is represented by *taini regis* clustered together in separate sections at the end of folios of 18 counties. These people will not be considered here for two reasons. For one, they figured in previous research, and their sociological nature is well-understood: many of these *thegns* were associated with the economy of royal demesne and resemble petty *ministeriales* on the Continent.[1192] Despite my previous support, I am presently less inclined to fully subscribe to Susan Reynolds's somewhat categorical claim that,

> [...] if "king's thegn" always meant a great man rather than a thegn of the king then the Domesday scribe misunderstood it.[1193]

These petty king's *thegns*, whose number Stephen Baxter and Chris Lewis estimated at 376 individuals with a total income of £886,[1194] could have been the same social category to which Leofric from Taunton (above, pp. 195–196) had previously belonged, though his identity is complicated. At least after the Conquest, they could be among the *thegnly* addressees of royal writs.[1195] But the other reason to avoid discussing them in the current section is that these tenants of the king attract *thegnly* qualifications not as individuals but as groups, sometimes called by other names ("king's free men") in other shires too. Ann Williams's meticulous analysis demonstrates that Domesday commissioners/scribes confronted difficulties with a universal description for these men and women, so that they could have been

> [...] all those miscellaneous little people who had to be listed with the tenants in chief because they were royal servants or did not fit in anywhere else.[1196]

She arrived at the conclusion that these petty *thegns* were the precursors of later medieval sergeants (≺ LAT. *servientes*, lit. those who serve), with which I agree. Overall, petty *thegns* of the king on this fifth group thus look like a social category whose relevant social feature was an array of certain professions.[1197] As *thegns*, these people appear more classified by external observers, and it is unknowable if they were a self-aware social group with a common identity, let alone a *thegnly* one. For such uncertainty and in view of Ann Williams's guess about their artificial compartmentalisation, they deserved to be an object of other studies.

The raw data on individual Domesday *thegns* can be assessed in APPENDIX 5. Three metrics in four variants were tried on them. The resultant numerical data are presented in Table 4. First, three units of measurements were selected: landed property, measured

1191 Two exceptions come up in Bedfordshire (*DB* I, fols. 218d [BDF 57,16] – *pater hujus Turgoti teignus regis fuit* – and 215a–b [BDF 25,14] – *tenuit Leuuin* cilt *teignus regis*) though in the latter case the same individual on nine occasions is called a *tainus regis Edwardi* in other counties. One person in Lincolnshire, Eskil (≺ ON Áskell) (*DB* I, fol. 376d [LIN CK11]), is also called a king's *thegn* (*tainus regis*) but he cannot be securely identified.

1192 Williams 1995, chap 5; Lavelle 2007, chap 5.

1193 Sukhino-Khomenko 2018a, p. 55, quoting a passage from Reynolds's 1992 article that for some reason was not reworked in the 1994 book as the rest.

1194 Baxter and Lewis 2017, p. 371.

1195 Sukhino-Khomenko 2022, pp. 197–200, building on Ann Williams and David Bates's prosopographical studies. Dr Williams and I (personal communication 2 October 2023) share the opinion that Bates, *RRAN* 339 (after 1070 AD) in question must have been exceptional, though.

1196 Williams 1995, p. 113, quoting Susan Reynolds.

1197 *Cf.* David Roffe's dissenting opinion that they were the king's booklandless and sokeless "median *thegns*" (Roffe 1989, p. 170; 2007, p. 158).

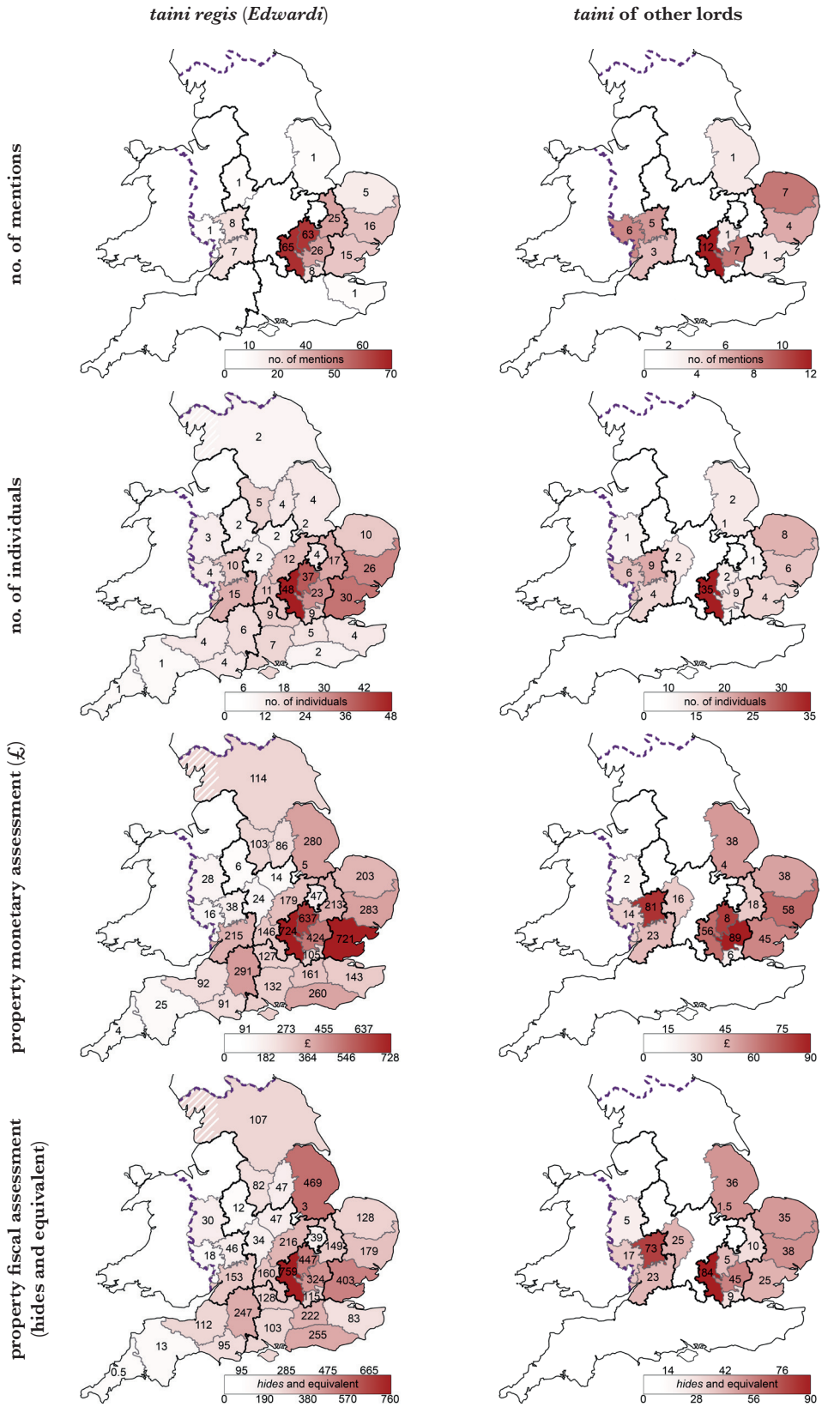
with cumulative monetary income[1198] and fiscal assesment in *hides* (or equivalent) – the two pronouncedly correlated; cumulative number of individuals; and cumulative number of references to them as *thegns*. The chosen objects of comparisons for these numbers were first shires and then the seven Domesday Circuits. For ease of illustration, the same data have been chartered as Map 10. Then the same three operations were performed on a dataset from which all *anonymi* were removed (543 references). But because a generic formula appears as "X number of [sometimes numerical values may be absent] *thegns* held this manor and had Y number of *hides* among them; they could (not) go with it as they please", in the absence of additional identifiers, it is patently impossible to assess if all such *anonymi* always were unique individuals or emerged elsewhere in the text with names. In other words, we cannot know how many truly unique anonymous *thegns* were entered in *Domesday Book*, which could seriously garble the statistics. If we assume uniqueness of each and every anonymous *thegn*, the total number of Domesday *thegns* in "times of King Edward" would be 1,938 persons whose gross property was valued at £10,722 and assessed at 9,830 *hides* and who were called *thegns* a total of 906 times. Conversely, if we subtract all *anonymi* as too much of a distortion factor with a pronounced gravitation towards the south-west (exactly half of all *anonymi* are recorded in Circuit 2, 763 out of 1,528), we are left with 410 identifiable individuals who among themselves owned £9,269 and 8,255 *hides* and were expressly called *thegns* 392 times. Either 78% of all *thegns* had only 13.5% of all monetary income from land in this social category, which would mean a huge gap in wealth,[1199] or we are unable to identify a good deal of them among named individuals.

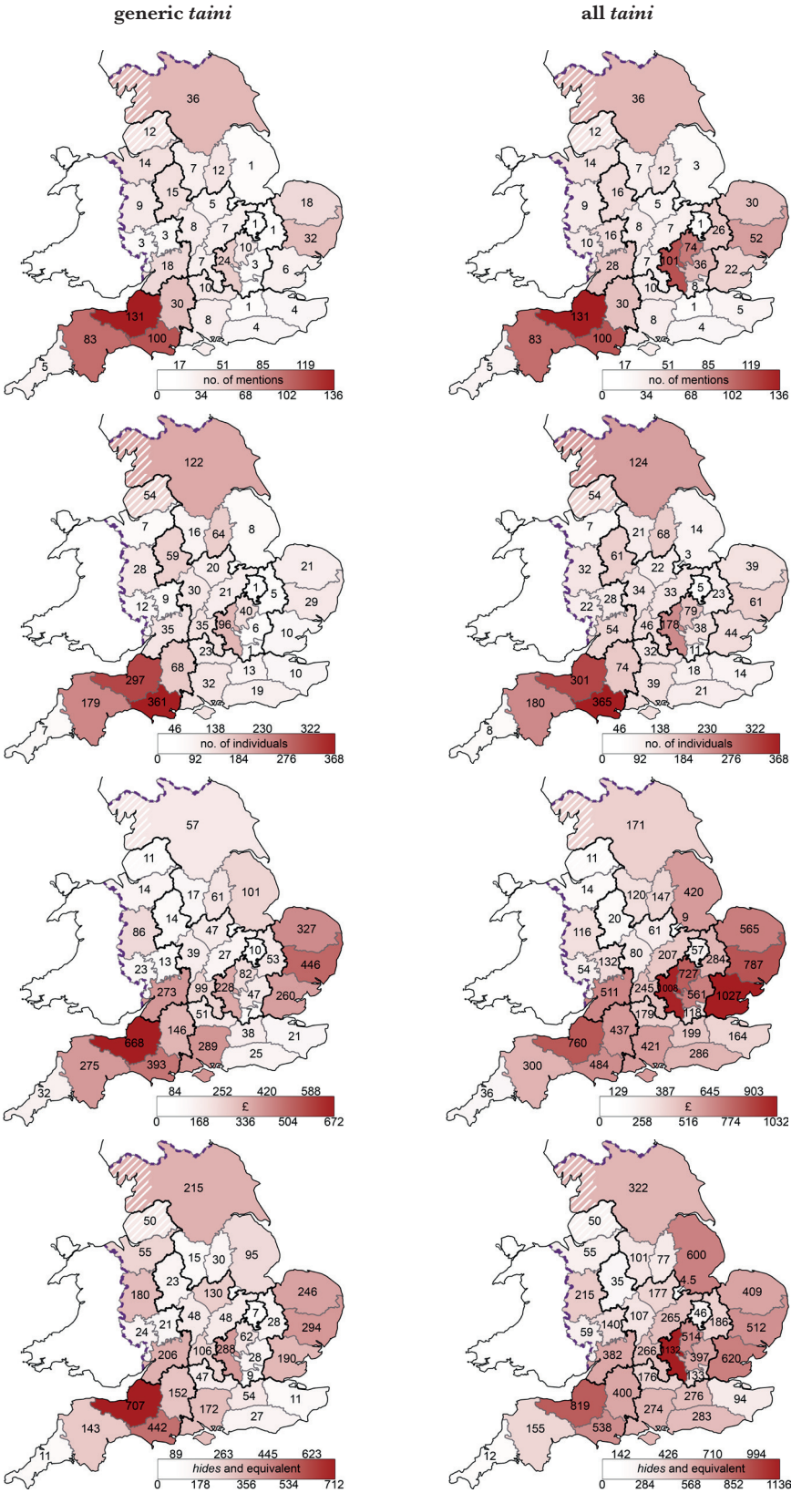
The final textual product of the Domesday survey as we have it reveals a regretful deficiency of systematicity when it comes to these figures. A visual observation reveals that on the shire level, with or without *anonymi*, Groups 2 and 3 demonstrate general correlation among all three units of measurement, but Group 1 deviates from this trend for no apparent material reason. 16 named *taini regis Edwardi* are known to have owned 1,258 *hides* of land worth £1,326 in shires south of the Thames (Circuits 1 and 2) but none was called a *thegn* here.[1200] The identical interplay between actual individuals and their lexical identification as *thegns* is observed in Circuit 6 (10 named *taini regis Edwardi* with a total income of £630 from 747 *hides* but no lexical references) and in Circuit 4 (21 named *taini regis Edwardi* with a total of 469 *hides* worth £369). The most serious damage to any anticipated patterns is the lack of good tangible historical models to explain the geographical distribution of *thegns*, their property, and mentions across the kingdom if Domesday supposedly recorded them accurately. Departing from the statistics of the royal diplomas, we could preconceive a concentration of *taini regis Edwardi* in historical and/or "Greater" Wessex. But south of the Thames, merely little less than 14.5% (16 out of 111) actually owned land worth 22.3% of the total income for Group 1. One could hypothesise that

1198 The *valet/valuit* data in Domesday text (see above, n. 415).

1199 This ratio, of course, immediately reminds of the empirical 80/20 Pareto principle, and we are only left to ponder if 13.5% instead of the nominal 20% fits this rule or not. It is perhaps worth comparing with the statistics put together by Baxter and Lewis 2017, p. 368 (table 9). Excluding the king but including the earls, of the personally identified 1066 AD landholders (i.e. not accounting for *anonymi*), 14.2% of people (1,280 out of 8,982 individuals) owned some 69% of all landed wealth (£49,421) as opposed to 7,701 persons who collectively owned only £7,286, and the smaller an individual's holding, the more such petty owners.

1200 PASE Domesday and the Phillimore edition indicate an undisclosed number of individuals in Sandwich (*DB* I, fol. 11b [KEN 5,198]) as the only reference to *taini regis Edwardi* in this region. In truth, the text with a lacuna (*In Sanduuic* […] *Hoc M*[*anerium*] *tenebant … teigni de rege . E .*) can be a read as a reference to generic *taini* who held from the king.


taini regis (*Edwardi*)
taini of other lords
no. of mentions
no. of individuals
property monetary assessment (£)
property fiscal assessment (hides and equivalent)
no. of mentions
no. of individuals
£
hides and equivalent



Map 10. Geographical distribution of Domesday *taini* (including *anonymi*)

Circuit 2					Circuit 1							No. of individuals			No. of mentions			Property monetary assessment (£)			Property fiscal assessment (*hides* and equivalent)		
Total	Wilts.	Soms.	Dorset	Devon	Corn.	*Total*	Sussex	Surrey	Kent	Hants.	Berks.	Shire	*tainī regis (Edwardī)*	*tainī* of other lords	generic *tainī*	all *tainī*	*tainī regis (Edwardī)*	*tainī* of other lords	generic *tainī*	all *tainī*	*tainī regis (Edwardī)*	*tainī* of other lords	generic *tainī*	all *tainī*
16 (10.6%)/	6 (4%)/	4 (2.6%)/	4 (2.6%)/	1 (0.7%)/	1 (0.7%)/	*27 (17.9%)/*	2 (1.3%)/	5 (3.3%)/	4 (2.6%)/	7 (4.6%)/	9 (5,9%)/													
16 (12.8%)	6 (4.8%)	4 (3.2%)	4 (3.2%)	1 (0.8%)	1 (0.8%)	*27 (21.8%)*	2 (1.6%)	5 (4%)	4 (3.2%)	7 (5.6%)	9 (7.2%)													
0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*0 (0%)/*	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/													
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*0 (0%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	(0%)	(0%)	0 (0%)													
912 (52.8%)/	68 (3.9%)/	297 (17.2%)/	361 (20.9%)/	179 (10.4%)/	7 (0.4%)/	*97 (5.6%)/*	19 (1.1%)/	13 (0.8%)/	10 (0.6%)/	32 (1.9%)/	23 (1.3%)													
150 (56.8%)	10 (3.8%)	74 (28%)	14 (5.3%)	49 (18.6%)	3 (1.1%)	*20 (7.6%)*	0 (0%)	4 (1.5%)	2 (0.8%)	12 (4.5%)	2 (0,8%)													
928 (48%)/	74 (3.8%)/	301 (15.6%)/	365 (18.9%)/	180 (9.3%)/	8 (0.4%)/	*124 (6.4%)/*	21 (1.1%)/	18 (0.9%)/	14 (0.7%)/	39 (2%)/	32 (1.7%)/													
166 (40.7%)	16 (3.9%)	78 (19.1%)	18 (4.4%)	50 (12.3%)	4 (1%)	*47 (11.5%)*	2 (0.5%)	9 (2.2%)	6 (1.5%)	19 (4.7%)	11 (2.7%)													
0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*1 (0.4%)/*	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	1 (0.4%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/													
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*0 (0%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)													
0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*0 (0%)/*	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/													
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*0 (0%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)													
349 (56.7%)/	30 (4.9%)/	131 (21.3%)/	100 (16.2%)/	83 (13.5%)/	5 (0.8%)/	*27 (4.4%)/*	4 (0.6%)/	1 (0.2%)/	4 (0.6%)/	8 (1.3%)/	10 (1.6%)/													
100 (52.4%)	4 (2.1%)	47 (24.6%)	8 (4.2%)	41 (21.5%)	0 (0%)	*4 (2.1%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (1.0%)	1 (0,5%)													
349 (38.6%)/	30 (3.3%)/	131 (14.5%)/	100 (11%)/	83 (9.2%)/	5 (0.6%)/	*28 (3.1%)/*	4 (0.4%)/	1 (0.1%)/	5 (0.6%)/	8 (0.9%)/	10 (1.1%)/													
100 (25.6%)	4 (1%)	47 (12%)	8 (2%)	41 (10.5%)	0 (0%)	*4 (1.0%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (1.3%)	2 (0.5%)	1 (0,3%)													
502.96 (8.3%)/	291.16 (4.9%)/	91.9 (1.5%)/	91 (1.5%)/	25 (0.4%)/	3.9 (0.1%)/	*824.82 (13.9%)/*	260.7 (4.4%)/	161.44 (2.7%)/	143.2 (2.4%)/	131.98 (2.2%)/	127.5 (2.1%)/													
502.96 (8.2%)	291.16 (5%)	91.9 (1.6%)	91 (1.6%)	25 (0.4%)	3.9 (0.1%)	*824.82 (14.2%)*	260.7 (4.5%)	161.44 (2.8%)	143.2 (2.5%)	131.98 (2.3%)	127.5 (2.2%)													
0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*0 (0%)/*	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/													
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*0 (0%)*	(0%	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)													
1513.73 (35.3%)/	145.89 (3.4%)/	667.78 (15.6%)/	392.75 (9.2%)/	275.06 (6.4%)/	32.25 (0.8%)/	*426.25 (9.9%)/*	25.5 (0.6%)/	38.19 (0.9%)/	21.5 (0.5%)/	289.46 (6.8%)/	51.6 (1.2%)/													
798.7 (26.4%)	55.65 (1.8%)	398.13 (13.2%)	114.85 (3.8%)	211.82 (7%)	18.25 (0.6%)	*322.15 (10.7%)*	0 (0%)	35.19 (1.2%)	18.5 (0.6%)	250.46 (6.3%)	18 (0.6%)													
2016.69 (18.8%)/	437.05 (4.1%)/	759.68 (7.1%)/	483.75 (4.5%)/	300.06 (2.8%)/	36.15 (0.3%)/	*1251.07 (11.7%)/*	286.2 (2.7%)/	199.63 (1.9%)/	164.7 (1.5%)/	421.44 (3.9%)/	179.1 (1.7%)/													
1301.66 (14%)	346.81 (3.7%)	490.03 (5.3%)	205.85 (2.2%)	236.82 (2.6%)	22.15 (0.2%)	*1146.97 (12.4%)*	260.7 (2.8%)	196.63 (2.1%)	161.7 (1.7%)	382.44 (4.1%)	145.5 (1.6%)													
468.46 (9%)/	247.09 (4.7%)/	112 (2.1%)/	95.51 (1.8%)/	13.38 (0.3%)/	0.48 (0%)/	*791.44 (15.1%)/*	255.51 (4.9%)/	221.84 (4.2%)/	83 (1.6%)/	102.59 (2%)/	128.5 (2.5%)/													
468.46 (9.3%)	247.09 (5%)	112 (2.3%)	95.51 (1.9%)	13.38 (0.3%)	0.48 (0%)	*791.44 (16%)*	255.51 (5.2%)	221.84 (4.5%)	83 (1.7%)	102.59 (2.1%)	128.5 (2.6%)													
0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*0 (0%)/*	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/													
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*0 (%)*	0 (%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)													
1454.96 (34.9%)/	152.6 (3.7%)/	707.37 (17%)/	442.23 (10.6%)/	141.43 (3.4%)/	11.33 (0.3%)/	*311.41 (7.5%)/*	27.25 (0.7%)/	54 (1.3%)/	10.88 (0.3%)/	171.78 (4.1%)/	47.5 (1.1%)/													
730.67 (27.1%)	64.26 (2.4%)	400.03 (14.8%)	145.93 (5.4%)	113.62 (4.2%)	6.33 (0.3%)	*211.22 (7.8%)*	0 (0%)	48 (1.8%)	8.44 (0.3%)	148.78 (5.5%)	6 (0.2%)													
1923.42 (19.6%)/	399.69 (4.1%)/	819.37 (8.3%)/	537.74 (5.5%)/	154.81 (1.6%)/	11.81 (0.1%)/	*1102.85 (11.2%)/*	282.76 (2.9%)/	275.84 (2.8%)/	93.88 (1%)/	274.37 (2.8%)/	176 (1.8%)/													
1199.13 (14.5%)	311.35 (3.8%)	512.03 (6.2%)	241.44 (2.9%)	127 (1.5%)	7.31 (0.1%)	*1002.66 (12.1%)*	255.51 (3.1%)	269.84 (3.3%)	91.44 (1.1%)	251.37 (3%)	134.5 (1.6%)													

Circuit 4					Circuit 3							Shire
					No. of individuals							
Total	Warwicks.	Staffs.	Oxon.	Northants.	Leics.	*Total*	Middx.	Herts.	Cambs.	Bucks.	Beds.	
29 (19.2%)/	2 (1.3%)/	2 (1.3%)/	11 (7.3%)/	12 (7.9%)/	2 (1.3%)/	*134 (88.7%)*/	9 (6%)/	23 (15.2%)/	17 (11.3%)/	48 (31.8%)/	37 (24.5%)/	*tainī wīgs (Edward)*
29 (23.2%)	2 (1.6%)	2 (1.6%)	11 (8.8%)	12 (9.6%)	2 (1.6%)	*108 (86.4%)*	8 (6.4%)	19 (15.2%)	16 (12.8%)	39 (31.2%)	26 (20.8%)	
2 (2.6%)/	2 (2.6%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*47 (60.3%)*/	1 (1.3%)/	9 (11.5%)/	1 (1.3%)/	34 (43.6%)/	2 (2.6%)/	*tainī* of
2 (5.1%)	2 (5.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*13 (33.3%)*	1 (2.6%)	5 (12.8%)	1 (2.6%)	6 (15.4%)	0 (0%)	other lords
165 (9.6%)/	30 (1.7%)/	59 (3.4%)/	35 (2%)/	21 (1.2%)/	20 (1.2%)/	*148 (8.6%)*/	1 (0.06%)/	6 (0.3%)/	5 (0.3%)/	96 (5.6%)/	40 (2.3%)/	generic
8 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.8%)	2 (0.8%)	4 (1.5%)	*42 (15.9%)*	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	4 (1.5%)	32 (12.1%)	4 (1.5%)	*tainī*
196 (10.1%)/	34 (1.8%)/	61 (3.2%)/	46 (2.4%)/	33 (1.7%)/	22 (1.1%)/	*304 (15.7%)*/	11 (0.6%)/	38 (2%)/	23 (1.2%)/	178 (9.2%)/	79 (4.1%)/	all *tainī*
39 (9.6%)	4 (1%)	2 (0.5%)	13 (3.2%)	14 (3.4%)	6 (1.5%)	*163 (39.9%)*	10 (2.5%)	25 (6.1%)	21 (5.1%)	77 (18.9%)	30 (7.4%)	
					No. of mentions							
1 (0.4%)/	0 (0%)/	1 (0.4%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*187 (77.3%)*/	8 (3.3%)/	26 (10.7%)/	25 (10.3%)/	65 (26.9%)/	63 (26%)/	*tainī wīgs (Edward)*
1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*114 (68.3%)*	7 (4.2%)	24 (14.4%)	24 (14.4%)	0 (0%)	59 (35.3%)	
0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*29 (42.6%)*/	0 (0%)/	7 (14.9%)/	0 (0%)/	12 (25.5%)/	1 (2.1%)/	*tainī* of
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*9 (27.2%)*	0 (0%)	5 (15.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (12.1%)	0 (0%)	other lords
42 (6.8%)/	8 (1.3%)/	15 (2.4%)/	7 (1.1%)/	7 (1.1%)/	5 (0.8%)/	*38 (6.2%)*/	0 (0%)/	3 (0.5%)/	1 (0.2%)/	24 (3.9%)/	10 (1.6%)/	generic
2 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.5%)	*13 (6.8%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (6.3%)	1 (0.5%)	*tainī*
43 (4.8%)/	8 (0.9%)/	16 (1.8%)/	7 (0.8%)/	7 (0.8%)/	5 (0.6%)/	*245 (27.1%)*/	8 (0.9%)/	36 (4%)/	26 (2.9%)/	101 (11.2%)/	74 (8.2%)/	all *tainī*
3 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	*136 (34.8%)*	7 (1.8%)	29 (7.4%)	24 (6.1%)	16 (4.1%)	60 (15.3%)	
					Property monetary assessment (£)							
369.13 (6.2%)/	23.75 (0.4%)/	6.08 (0.1%)/	146 (2.5%)/	179.1 (3%)/	14.2 (0.2%)/	*2104.31 (35.4%)*/	105.43 (1.8%)/	424.64 (7.1%)/	213.35 (3.6%)/	724.03 (12.2%)/	636.86 (10.7%)/	*tainī wīgs (Edward)*
369.13 (6.4%)	23.75 (0.4%)	6.08 (0.1%)	146 (2.5%)	179.1 (3.1%)	14.2 (0.2%)	*1889.03 (32.6%)*	102.1 (1.8%)	424.61 (7.3%)	229.02 (3.9%)	706.03 (12.2%)	511.76 (8.8%)	
16.6 (3.4%)/	16.6 (3.4%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*177.6 (36%)*/	5.7 (1.1%)/	89.4 (18.1%)/	18.2 (3.7%)/	56.2 (11.4%)/	8 (1.6%)/	*tainī* of
16.6 (3.7%)	16.6 (3.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*138.4 (31.2%)*	5.7 (1.3%)	75.4 (17%)	18.2 (4.1%)	39 (8.8%)	0 (0%)	other lords
227.86 (5.3%)/	39.5 (0.9%)/	14.46 (0.3%)/	99 (2.3%)/	27.6 (0.6%)/	47.3 (1.1%)/	*416.78 (9.7%)*/	7 (0.2%)/	47.08 (1.1%)/	52.65 (1.2%)/	228 (5.3%)/	82.05 (1.9%)/	generic
78.6 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21 (0.7%)	21.8 (0.7%)	35.8 (1.2%)	*288.11 (9.5%)*	7 (0.2%)	11 (0.4%)	47.57 (1.6%)	188.62 (6.2%)	33.92 (1.1%)	tainī
613.57 (5.7%)/	79.83 (0.7%)/	20.54 (0.2%)/	245 (2.3%)/	206.7 (1.9%)/	61.5 (0.6%)/	*2698.67 (25.2%)*/	118.1 (1.1%)/	561.14 (5.2%)/	284.25 (2.7%)/	1008.27 (9.4%)/	726.91 (6.8%)/	all *tainī*
464.31 (3%)	40.33 (0.4%)	6.08 (0.1%)	167 (1.8%)	200.9 (2.2%)	50 (0.5%)	*2400.01 (25.9%)*	114.77 (1.2%)	511.03 (5.5%)	294.84 (3.2%)	933.69 (10.1%)	545.68 (5.9%)	
469.74 (9%)/	34.26 (0.7%)/	12.5 (0.2%)/	159.88 (3.1%)/	216.3 (4.1%)/	46.8 (0.9%)/	*1794.24 (34.3%)*/	115 (2.2%)/	324.16 (6.2%)/	148.83 (2.8%)/	759.19 (14.5%)/	447.06 (8.5%)/	*tainī wīgs (Edward)*
463.74 (9.5%)	34.26 (0.7%)	12.5 (0.3%)	159.88 (3.2%)	216.3 (4.4%)	46.8 (0.9%)	*1744.49 (35.3%)*	110 (2.2%)	320.66 (6.5%)	145.33 (2.9%)	741.94 (15%)	426.56 (8.6%)	
24.71 (5.7%)/	24.71 (5.7%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	0 (0%)/	*153.1 (35.4%)*/	9 (2.1%)/	44.71 (10.3%)/	9.75 (2.3%)/	84.64 (19.6%)/	5 (1.2%)/	*tainī* of
24.71 (6.5%)	24.71 (6.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	*117.99 (31%)*	9 (2.4%)	35.46 (9.3%)	9.75 (2.6%)	63.78 (16.8%)	0 (0%)	other lords
356.19 (8.6%)/	48.39 (1.2%)/	23.01 (0.6%)/	106.26 (2.6%)/	48.33 (1.2%)/	130.2 (3.1%)/	*414.67 (10%)*/	9 (0.2%)/	28.26 (0.7%)/	27.65 (0.7%)/	288 (6.9%)/	61.76 (1.5%)/	generic
143.15 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21.25 (0.8%)	34.2 (1.3%)	87.7 (3.3%)	*324.58 (12%)*	9 (0.3%)	19 (0.7%)	24.65 (0.9%)	239.18 (8.9%)	32.75 (1.2%)	*tainī*
650.64 (8.7%)/	107.36 (1.1%)/	35.51 (0.4%)/	266.14 (2.7%)/	264.63 (2.7%)/	177 (1.8%)/	*2262.01 (24%)*/	133 (1.4%)/	397.13 (4%)/	186.23 (1.9%)/	1131.83 (11.5%)/	513.82 (5.2%)/	all *tainī*
637.6 (7.7%)	58.97 (0.7%)	12.5 (0.2%)	181.13 (2.2%)	250.5 (3%)	134.5 (1.6%)	*2187.06 (26.5%)*	128 (1.5%)	375.12 (4.5%)	179.73 (2.2%)	1044.9 (12.6%)	459.31 (5.6%)	

Circuit 6						Circuit 5							No. of individuals			No. of mentions			Property monetary assessment (£)			Property fiscal assessment (*hides* and equivalent)		
Total	Yorks.	Rut.	Nots.	Lincs.	Hunts.	Derbys.	*Total*	Worcs.	Salop.	Herefords.	Glouc.	Ches.	S. Lancas.	Shire										
21 (13.3%)/ 21 (16.8%)	2 (1.3%)/ 2 (1.6%)	2 (1.3%)/ 2 (1.6%)	4 (2.6%)/ 4 (3.2%)	4 (2.6%)/ 4 (3.2%)	4 (2.6%)/ 4 (3.2%)	5 (5%)/ 5 (2.6%)	*32 (21.2%)/ 32 (25.6%)*	10 (6.6%)/ 10 (8%)	3 (2%)/ 3 (2.4%)	4 (2.6%)/ 4 (3.2%)	15 (9.9%)/ 15 (12%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī wegis (Edward)*									
3 (3.8%)/ 2 (5.1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)/ 1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	2 (2.6%)/ 1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*20 (25.6%)/ 18 (46.2%)*	9 (11.5%)/ 9 (23.1%)	1 (1.3%)/ 1 (2.6%)	6 (7.7%)/ 6 (15.4%)	4 (5.1%)/ 2 (5.1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī* of other lords									
211 (12.2%)/ 22 (8.3%)	122 (7.1%)/ 2 (0.8%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	64 (3.7%)/ 9 (3.4%)	8 (0.5%)/ 5 (1.9%)	1 (0.06%)/ 1 (0.4%)	16 (0.9%)/ 5 (1.9%)	*145 (8.4%)/ 43 (16.3%)*	9 (0.5%)/ 2 (0.8%)	28 (1.6%)/ 16 (6.1%)	12 (0.7%)/ 2 (0.8%)	35 (2%)/ 18 (6.8%)	7 (0.4%)/ 5 (1.9%)	54 (3.1%)/ 1 (0.4%)	generic *tainī*									
235 (12.2%)/ 45 (11%)	124 (6.4%)/ 4 (1%)	3 (0.2%)/ 3 (0.7%)	68 (3.5%)/ 13 (3.2%)	14 (0.7%)/ 10 (2.5%)	5 (0.3%)/ 5 (1.2%)	21 (1.1%)/ 10 (2.5%)	*197 (10.2%)/ 93 (22.8%)*	28 (1.4%)/ 21 (5.1%)	32 (1.7%)/ 20 (4.9%)	22 (1.1%)/ 12 (2.9%)	54 (2.8%)/ 35 (8.6%)	7 (0.4%)/ 5 (1.2%)	54 (2.8%)/ 1 (0.2%)	all *tainī*									
1 (0.4%)/ 1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	1 (0.4%)/ 1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*16 (6.6%)/ 16 (9.6%)*	8 (3.3%)/ 8 (4.8%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	1 (0.4%)/ 1 (0.6%)	7 (2.9%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī wegis (Edward)*									
1 (2.1%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	1 (2.1%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*14 (29.8%)/ 13 (39.4%)*	5 (10.6%)/ 5 (15.2%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	6 (12.8%)/ 6 (18.2%)	3 (6.4%)/ 2 (6.1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī* of other lords									
57 (9.3%)/ 7 (3.7%)	36 (5.8%)/ 2 (1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	12 (1.9%)/ 2 (1%)	1 (0.2%)/ 0 (0%)	1 (0.2%)/ 0 (0%)	7 (1.1%)/ 2 (1%)	*47 (7.6%)/ 18 (9.4%)*	3 (0.5%)/ 1 (0.5%)	9 (1.5%)/ 5 (2.6%)	3 (0.5%)/ 1 (0.5%)	18 (2.9%)/ 8 (4.2%)	14 (2.3%)/ 3 (1.6%)	12 (1.9%)/ 1 (0.5%)	generic *tainī*									
59 (6.3%)/ 8 (2%)	36 (4%)/ 2 (0.5%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	12 (1.3%)/ 2 (0.5%)	3 (0.3%)/ 2 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)/ 0 (0%)	7 (0.8%)/ 2 (0.5%)	*77 (8.3%)/ 48 (12.3%)*	16 (1.8%)/ 14 (3.6%)	9 (1%)/ 5 (1.3%)	10 (1.1%)/ 8 (2%)	28 (3.1%)/ 10 (2.6%)	14 (1.5%)/ 3 (0.8%)	12 (1.3%)/ 1 (0.2%)	all *tainī*									
636.43 (10.7%)/ 636.43 (11%)	113.97 (1.9%)/ 113.97 (2%)	5 (0.1%)/ 5 (0.1%)	86.25 (1.5%)/ 86.25 (1.5%)	280.8 (4.7%)/ 280.8 (4.8%)	47 (0.8%)/ 47 (0.8%)	103.41 (1.7%)/ 103.41 (1.8%)	*297.26 (5%)/ 297.26 (5.1%)*	38.21 (0.6%)/ 38.21 (0.7%)	28.2 (0.5%)/ 28.2 (0.5%)	15.85 (0.3%)/ 15.85 (0.3%)	215 (3.6%)/ 215 (3.7%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī wegis (Edward)*									
42 (8.3%)/ 41 (9.2%)	4 (0.8%)/ 4 (0.9%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	38 (7.7%)/ 37 (8.3%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*120.6 (24.4%)/ 115.6 (115.6%)*	81.3 (16.5%)/ 81.3 (18.3%)	1.7 (0.3%)/ 1.7 (0.4%)	14.6 (2.9%)/ 14.6 (3.3%)	23 (4.7%)/ 18 (4.1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī* of other lords									
246.14 (5.7%)/ 147.21 (4.9%)	57.2 (1.3%)/ 0.5 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	61.11 (1.4%)/ 24.88 (0.8%)	100.84 (2.4%)/ 99.84 (3.3%)	10 (0.2%)/ 10 (0.3%)	16.99 (0.4%)/ 11.99 (0.4%)	*420.79 (9.8%)/ 354.41 (11.7%)*	12.8 (0.3%)/ 10 (0.3%)	86.11 (2%)/ 85.21 (2.8%)	23.48 (0.5%)/ 9.63 (0.3%)	273.01 (6.4%)/ 235.03 (7.8%)	14.62 (0.6%)/ 14.54 (0.5%)	10.77 (0.2%)/ 0 (0%)	generic tainī									
924.57 (8.6%)/ 824.64 (8.9%)	171.17 (1.6%)/ 114.47 (1.2%)	9 (0.1%)/ 9 (0.1%)	147.36 (1.4%)/ 111.13 (1.2%)	419.64 (3.9%)/ 417.64 (4.5%)	57 (0.5%)/ 57 (0.6%)	120.4 (1.1%)/ 115.4 (1.2%)	*838.7 (7.8%)/ 767.29 (8.3%)*	132.34 (1.2%)/ 129.51 (1.4%)	116.01 (1.1%)/ 115.11 (1.2%)	53.95 (0.5%)/ 40.1 (0.4%)	511.01 (4.8%)/ 468.03 (5%)	14.54 (0.2%)/ 14.54 (0.2%)	10.77 (0.1%)/ 0 (0%)	all *tainī*									
751.62 (14.4%)/ 751.62 (15.2%)	107.53 (2.1%)/ 107.53 (2.2%)	3 (0.1%)/ 3 (0.1%)	47.17 (0.9%)/ 47.17 (1%)	468.71 (9%)/ 468.71 (9.5%)	39 (0.7%)/ 39 (0.8%)	86.21 (1.6%)/ 86.21 (1.7%)	*246.75 (4.7%)/ 246.75 (5%)*	46 (0.9%)/ 46 (0.9%)	30 (0.6%)/ 30 (0.6%)	17.75 (0.3%)/ 17.75 (0.4%)	153 (2.9%)/ 153 (3.1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī wegis (Edward)*									
38 (8.9%)/ 38 (10%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	1.5 (0.3%)/ 1.5 (0.4%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	36.5 (8.4%)/ 32.5 (8.5%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*118.26 (27.3%)/ 108.26 (28.4%)*	73 (16.9%)/ 73 (19.2%)	5 (1.2%)/ 5 (1.3%)	17.26 (4%)/ 17.26 (4.5%)	23 (5.3%)/ 13 (3.4%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	*tainī* of other lords									
362.07 (8.7%)/ 127.96 (4.7%)	215.01 (5.2%)/ 4 (0.1%)	0 (0%)/ 0 (0%)	29.81 (0.7%)/ 15.21 (0.6%)	95.06 (2.3%)/ 94.31 (3.5%)	7 (0.2%)/ 7 (0.3%)	15.19 (0.4%)/ 7.44 (0.3%)	*535.27 (12.8%)/ 428.77 (15.9%)*	21 (0.5%)/ 9 (0.3%)	179.9 (4.3%)/ 172.15 (6.4%)	23.75 (0.6%)/ 9.25 (0.3%)	206.13 (4.9%)/ 172.38 (6.4%)	54.74 (2.5%)/ 53.99 (2.4%)	49.75 (1.2%)/ 12 (0.4%)	generic *tainī*									
1151.69 (11.7%)/ 913.58 (11.1%)	322.54 (3.3%)/ 111.53 (1.3%)	4.5 (0.04%)/ 4.5 (0.1%)	76.98 (0.8%)/ 62.38 (0.8%)	600.27 (6.1%)/ 595.52 (7.2%)	46 (0.5%)/ 46 (0.6%)	101.4 (1%)/ 93.65 (1.1%)	*900.28 (9.2%)/ 783.78 (9.5%)*	140 (1.4%)/ 128 (1.5%)	214.9 (2.2%)/ 207.15 (2.5%)	58.76 (0.6%)/ 44.26 (0.5%)	382.13 (3.9%)/ 338.38 (4.1%)	54.74 (0.5%)/ 53.99 (2.4%)	49.75 (0.5%)/ 12 (0.1%)	all *tainī*									

Circuit 7	TOTAL	Total	Suff.	Norf.	Essex	Shire	No. of individuals	No. of mentions	Property monetary assessment (£)	Property fiscal assessment (*hides* and equivalent)
						taini regis (Edwardi)				
	151/	*66 (43.7%)/*	26 (17.2%)/	10 (6.6%)/	30 (19.9%)/	*taini* of other lords				
	125	*64 (51.2%)*	26 (20.8%)	9 (7.2%)	29 (23.2%)	generic *taini*				
	78/	*18 (23.1%)/*	6 (7.7%)/	8 (10.3%)/	4 (5.1%)/	all *taini*				
	39	*17 (46.6%)*	6 (15.4%)	7 (17.9%)	4 (10.3%)					
	1727/	*60 (3.5%)/*	29 (1.7%)/	21 (1.2%)/	10 (0.6%)/					
	264	*57 (21.6%)*	29 (11%)	19 (7.2%)	9 (3.4%)					
	1934/	*144 (7.4%)/*	61 (3.2%)/	39 (2%)/	44 (2.3%)/					
	408	*138 (33.8%)*	61 (15%)	35 (8.6%)	42 (10.3%)					
	242/	*36 (14.9%)/*	16 (6.6%)/	5 (2.1%)/	15 (6.2%)/	*taini regis (Edwardi)*				
	167	*35 (21%)*	16 (9.6%)	5 (3%)	14 (8.4%)	*taini* of other lords				
	47/	*12 (25.5%)/*	4 (8.5%)/	7 (14.9%)/	1 (2.1%)/	generic *taini*				
	33	*13 (39.4%)*	4 (12.1%)	6 (18.2%)	1 (3.0%)	all *taini*				
	616/	*56 (9.1%)/*	32 (5.2%)/	18 (2.9%)/	6 (1%)/					
	191	*47 (24.6%)*	27 (14.1%)	16 (8.4%)	4 (2.1%)					
	905/	*104 (11.5%)/*	52 (5.7%)/	30 (3.3%)/	22 (2.4%)/					
	391	*86 (22%)*	47 (12%)	28 (7.2%)	19 (4.9%)					
	5943.31/	*1208.4 (20.3%)/*	282.91 (4.8%)/	203.71 (3.4%)/	721.78 (12.1%)/	*taini regis (Edwardi)*				
	5804.47	*1200.35 (20.7%)*	282.86 (4.9%)	203.71 (3.5%)	713.78 (12.3%)	*taini* of other lords				
	493.81/	*137 (27.7%)/*	57.7 (11.7%)/	33.7 (6.8%)/	45.5 (9.2%)/	generic taini				
	443.58	*131.9 (29.7%)*	57.7 (13%)	28.7 (6.5%)	45.5 (10.3%)	all *taini*				
	4285.1/	*1033.35 (24.1%)/*	446.35 (10.4%)/	327.29 (7.6%)/	259.91 (6.1%)/					
	3021.23	*1032.05 (34.2%)*	446.35 (14.8%)	325.79 (10.8%)	259.91 (8.6%)					
	10722.22/	*2378.95 (22.2%)/*	787.01 (7.3%)/	564.75 (5.3%)/	1027.19 (9.6%)/					
	9269.28	*2364.4 (25.5%)*	786.96 (8.5%)	558.25 (6%)	1019.19 (11%)					
	5232.61/	*710.36 (13.6%)/*	178.85 (3.4%)/	127.74 (2.4%)/	403.77 (7.7%)/	*taini regis (Edwardi)*				
	4936.84	*708.29 (14.3%)*	178.85 (3.6%)	127.74 (2.6%)	401.7 (8.1%)	*taini* of other lords				
	432.58/	*98.51 (22.8%)/*	38.47 (8.9%)/	34.58 (8%)/	25.46 (5.9%)/	generic *taini*				
	380.47	*95.51 (25.1%)*	38.47 (10.1%)	31.58 (8.3%)	25.46 (6.7%)					
	4165.83/	*731.26 (17.6%)/*	294.4 (7.1%)/	246.3 (5.9%)/	190.56 (4.6%)/					
	2694.36	*728.01 (27.%)*	294.4 (10.9%)	243.3 (9%)	190.31 (7.1%)					
	9830.95/	*1540.06 (15.7%)/*	511.72 (5.2%)/	408.62 (4.2%)/	619.72 (6.3%)/					
	8255.62	*1531.81 (18.5%)*	511.72 (6.2%)	402.62 (4.9%)	617.47 (7.5%)					

Table 4. Geography of Domesday *thegns*. In the table, the *taini regis Edwardi* consistently absorbed *taini regis*. The percentage in parentheses indicates proportion of TOTAL; numbers after "/" indicate figures that do not include *anonymi*. Note the considerations similar to n. 856: same individuals could have landed properties in more than one shire and so can appear more than once in the "No. of individuals" column. To prevent counting such individuals more than once and thus creating *thegns* who never existed, the TOTAL in this column is not a mechanical summation of the numbers in the table but proceed from actual counting individuals, listed in Appendix 5

this mismatch between the data in the two sources owes to their fundamentally different nature: diplomas show a dynamic chronological picture, *Domesday Book* a static one. One could consequently argue that such a low percent could have been caused by the shifts in late Anglo-Saxon geopolitics: while 10th-century kings' cradle of political power had been Wessex, under King Cnut this territory saw the rise of Earl Godwine, and over his almost quarter-a-century-long reign King Edward never managed to push out and replace the earl's supporters here. The Worcester chronicler specifically mentioned that the host summons in 1051 AD applied on either side of the Thames, in consequence of which Godwine's army, probably composed of southern landed proprietors dissipated (above, §3.4.4.7). But this presupposition fails to explain why not a single *thegn* of Earl Harold, who inherited his father's earldom, is mentioned in Circuits 1 and 2 either. There is equally no readily available justification why generic *taini* suddenly drop in numbers west of the Circuit 1–2 border (16 named *thegns* and 77 *anonymi* as opposed to 128 and 763, respectively), nor why in the Northern "Danish Mercia" it steeply climbs in Nottinghamshire (9 named and 54 *anonymi*) but remains stable in Leicestershire (4 and 16) in, Lincolnshire (5 and 3) and Derbyshire (5 and 7, accordingly). The only superficial pattern is a seemingly sequential regression in the numbers of *taini regis Edwardi* when moving east of Buckinghamshire where they are exceptionally numerous (39 named *thegns* and 9 *anonymi*). East Midlands and East Anglia look densely packed with *taini regis Edwardi*: west to east, 25 named and 10 *anonymi* in Bedfordshire, 18 and 4 in Hertfordshire, 21 and 0 in Essex, 16 and 1 in Cambridgeshire,

6 and 14 in Suffolk, 7 and 1 in Norfolk. It would be tempting to posit some royal policy, but a plainer solution is the coincidental contiguity of Circuit 3, where LAT. *tainus* seems to have been an especially popular designator of personal commendation synonymous with LAT. *homo*, and of the unabbreviated Circuit 7 (the "Little" Domesday) whose data might be simply fuller than in the rest of the country. The only unquestionable trend is that in Dorset, Devonshire, and Somerset commissioners were especially keen to use LAT. *tainus* when describing petty co-holders/co-tenants of manors. Presently inexplicable is their same praxis in Yorkshire, the shire most remote from these three.

Paul Vinogradoff relied on *Geþyncðu* when he once posited that a 'feature common to all' *thegns* was them being 'all armed servants' expected to 'assist the lord in the performance of military duties charged to the estate'.[1201] The observed above, however, suggests a far less systematic picture. It and other incongruences may just as well stem from a haphazard use of Latinisations of OE *þegn* in the process of gathering and processing the raw Domesday data on the part of the commissioners, their informants, or later scribes. Above has already been amassed the evidence of occasional interchangeability between LAT. *tainus* and *liber homo* in *Domesday Book* (above, n. 1029). Another striking missed opportunity to use LAT *tainus* in places where royal documents before and after 1066 AD consistently used OE *þegn*, is in references to shire communities. There is a series of geographically dispersed entries which state that men of a county/hundred deny seeing a royal writ regarding property of particular manors.[1202] Not once are such witnesses called *thegns* as could be expected if collated with royal documentation (first among it, the writs).

***

Various narrative, legislative, and documentary sources indicate that in a relatively compact period between the reign of King Æthelred and the Norman Conquest (978–1066 AD), there existed a concept of a *thegn* as a member of lay elite and a representative of a local body politic. Regrettably, attempts to estimate the true depth of societal penetration and assimilation of these notions face significant challenges. Textual praxes in the use of Latin renditions of OE *þegn* in *Domesday Book* varied dramatically not only from Circuit to Circuit but also from shire to shire within same Circuits. To all appearances, Domesday commissioners had not been handed a set and fixed vocabulary at the start of the survey, so they lexically reworked the testimonies of their informants as saw fit, and later scribes did not strive for uniformity either. The abrupt gaps and discrepancies in the numbers of times these Latinisations occur in contiguous shires suggest that these numbers likely more reflect the lexical use by the commissioners rather than their informants:

> The language of Domesday Book is not the language of the Old English laws and charters, nor is it that of the later court rolls and manorial extents. It is a language peculiar to king William's great inquest; and no one key will unlock all its meanings.[1203]

Because in all shires teams of surveyors eventually did (to a various extent) resort to the native vernacular OE *þegn*, it is safe to assume that it had some meaning for the wider populace. The same follows from its occasional Latinised occurrence in generalising entries,

1201 Vinogradoff 1908, p. 409.

1202 *DB* I, fols. 36b (SUR 25,2), 47c (HAM 35,2), 59b (BRK 7,38), 64b (GLS 1,60), 208b (HUN D21), 374b (YKS CE34) – *cf.* fols. 50b (HAM 69,44) and 169a (GLS 59,1) when men of counties confirmed someone's property rights supported by a royal writ.

1203 Quote by Herbert P.R. Finberg after Pelteret 2001, p. 188 (n. 14).

such as customs of Hereford, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire. But the extent of the circulation and, hence, likely internalisation of *thegnly* identities cannot be definitively measured from our sources independent of West Saxon royal discourse.

3.4.6 Fragile Historical Ontology?

A different matter is how valid it is to classify in modern literature *all* Anglo-Saxon aristocratic, especially ennobled elites as *thegns* across the board by common historiographical implication of an internalisation of a *thegnly* identity as their master status.

3.4.6.1 the mechanism of internalisation of a *thegnly* identity

It would be preposterous to deny any internalisation of *thegnly* status by late Anglo-Saxon elites or the dialogue between them and the kings (*cf.* above, p. 201). That *De Obsessione Dunelmi* did Latinise OE *þegn* should indicate its social relevance for the text's intended readers, however hard to gauge. The same can be argued for, e.g., Domesday Latin language, and probably even more so for Anglo-Saxon vernacular charters. It is also clear that some Old English authors did not hesitate to apply an originally king-oriented term to this social category. If Archbishop Wulfstan was struggling to reduce observed social variations in *thegnly* status(es) to one common denominator, he must have taken note of his readers' *Erwartungshorizont* and *Erfahrungsraum*, even if those did not match his. His contemporary and pen-friend, Ælfric, who among other senses vested OE *þegn* with the broad meaning "aristocrat" (sometimes in possession of land: above, §3.3.10.1; at other times nobly-born: above, n. 1235), must have operated on the same level. From prefaces to his homilies and *Vitae* we learn that he intended his texts to be read out to those illiterate in Latin. Beside Ealdormen Æthelweard (quite adept in Latin) and his son Æthelmær, who both owned copies of his works, Ælfric's patrons numbered at least three local figures: Sigeweard of Asthall (Oxon.), Wulfgeat of Ilmington (Warwicks.), and one Sigefyrth (location not specified). All three received letters from the Abbot but are otherwise sadly unidentifiable.[1204] Their toponymic cognomina (*cf.* above, p. 116), though, suggest rootedness in respective neighbourhoods. All things considered, it is these high-stationed royal functionaries (themselves of royal descent, at that) and lower-calibre local names for whom Ælfric likely wrote. If that is the case, then given the didactic features of his pastoral texts, he probably penned them so that readers/audience could relate to the contents and, figuratively speaking, recognise themselves or those around them in its mirror.[1205] It would be very tempting to ascribe the Herefordshire widow's exhortation to her judges (*dōþ þegenlīce!*) as a calque of Ælfric's *hycg þegenlīce* in Josh. 1:18 (above, §3.3.7), as it would indicate a wider(er) reception of his language and, consequently, social terminology. This – internalisation to the level of reproduction of an authoritative labelling – is exactly the mechanism of creating a historical ontology, as described by Ian Hacking.

Despite the reserved attitude towards the top-down language of kingly sources as expressed throughout this chapter, one should not underestimate the royal discourse's effective force. A case in point is how the "English" identity, inspired by Bede and emanating from West Saxon monarchical propaganda, eventually ousted all other "tribal" identities (even

1204 Cubitt 2009.

1205 In his letter to Sigeweard, the Abbot declared in the first line that, "This letter was composed for one person, but it may still benefit many" (*Ðis gewrit wæs to anum men gediht ac hit mæg swa ðeah manegum fremian*; Heptateuch, p. 201).

in the kingdom's "Saxon" heartland).[1206] Some thirty Scandinavian runic inscriptions, i.e. definitionally an external source, that mention raids in "England" confirm that this superimposition had been widely accepted already by the 11th century.[1207]

Both authors just mentioned were "alumni" of the Winchester school (above, n. 397) and engaged in a high linguistic register of the late West Saxon use. Ælfric's audience, for all that we know, was geographically close and culturally exposed to it; Wulfstan's not so much. It seems not at all implausible that by posing elements of the *Compilation on Status* as ostensibly local regional norms, the Archbishop sought to educate his northern flock into ideal-typical southern social customs (below, §5.3.2) – tactics he had used before in the *Laws of Edward the Elder and Guthrum* (see above, §1.3).

How much did these aristocrats internalise external labelling of their social group by royal documentation and ecclesiastical intelligentsia? In other words, how profound was Ian Hacking's looping effect, how much a historical ontology were *thegns*?

3.4.6.2 a *thegnly* ontology: a collective and situational rather than individual social identity?

Fruitless are attempts to give any quantitative answer to this question with the help of *Domesday Book*. Other qualitative sources – the *Rectitudines*, miscellaneous Anglo-Saxon charters, *Ordinance Concerning the* Dunsæte or *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge* – are suspect of royal influence. *De Obsessione Dunelmi* evinces just how inconsistent OE *þegn* in the social fabric could be. Úlfr, Styrr, and Þórbrandr mentioned in this Durham text never got to be called *thegns* by its author, but they had witnessed King Æthelred's diplomas as his *ministri*. Conversely, *De Obsessione* calls *thegns* (without a *genetivus possessivus*) another three members of the tightly knit together Northumbrian elite – Crinan, Kilvert, son of Ligulfr, and Ormr, son of Gamall – and does so by latinising a vernacular lexeme.[1208] If Crinan and Kilvert at some point submitted to King Æthelred and became his *thegns*, they never travelled south to witness any diplomas (or such documents have not survived). To make things in 11th-century Northumbria even more complicated, John of Worcester elaborated on the account of the rebellion against Earl Tósti in 1065 AD. Where the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tersely states that 'all the thegns of Yorkshire [and in Northumberland]' rose up against the earl,[1209] John helpfully provided three names of these 'Northumbrian thegns' (*Northymbrenses ministri*) – Gamallbarn, Dunstan, son of Æthelnoth, and Gluniairnn, son of Heardwulf – who came to avenge the treacherous murder of another three 'noble Northumbrian thegns' (*nobilium Northymbrensium ministrorum*) – Gospatric, Gamall, son of Ormr,

1206 The mechanics of this process is currently beyond the point, and I briefly discuss (with references to many research studies that traced the said mechanics) it elsewhere: Sukhino-Khomenko 2021a, pp. 233–235.

1207 Jesch 2001, pp. 70–78, 80–83; Peterson 2007, p. 324.

1208 §2. *Ex qua habuit filiam Aldgitham, quam pater in conjugium dedit Maldredo filio Crinan tein* […] §3. *Filiam autem Alduni episcopi, quam comes Ucthredus dimiserat, quidam tein in Evervicshire, Kilvert filius Ligulfi, accepit uxorem* […] §8. *His ita peractis, quidam tein in Eoverwicschire, nomine Orm, filius Gamelionis, accepit uxorem unam ex quinque filiabus Aldredi comitis Etheldritham…* ('...from whom he had a daughter, Ealdgyth, whose father gave her in marriage to Maldred son of Crinan the thegn [...] Meanwhile, the daughter of Bishop Ealdun, whom Earl Uhtred had dismissed, was taken by Kilvert, son of Ligulfi, a Yorkshire thegn [...] Later, a thegn from Yorkshire, called Orm, son of Gamel, married Aetheldryth, one of the five daughters of Earl Ealdred...'; *SMOO* I, pp. 216–219; Morris 1992, pp. 2–5).

1209 *…þa þegnas ealle on Eoferwicscire* and *þa þegenas hi ealle on Eoforwicscire ⁊ on Norðhymbralande* in MSS D and E (*s.a.* 1065 AD), accordingly.

and Úlfr, son of Dolgfinnr.[1210] The two latter names are too numerous in the Domesday description of Yorkshire to meaningfully identify them with John's characters. The only Gospatric recorded in *Domesday Book* was still alive in 1086 AD, and so it is another miss. Based on geographic proximity, Dunstan on this list could have been Dunstan 9 of PASE Domesday; Gamallbarn is certainly the Northumbrian Gamel 13 whom Domesday surveyors recorded as "Gamelbar"; and Gluniairnn appears as the Yorkshireman "Glunier". None of these three identifiable individuals is called a *thegn* on any occasion whatsoever. With Gamall and Ormr, the situation gets complicated by their convoluted familial relationship. In addition to the already cited sources, an Ormr, son of Gamall, occurs as a wealthy Yorkshire magnate in *Domesday Book* who was still alive in 1086 AD. He might very well be *Orm Gamalsvna* who bought St Gregory's minster in Kirkdale, Yorkshire (North Riding), during Earl Tósti's rule, of which we know thanks to an inscription on a stone sundial in the south porch of the minster.[1211] Given the frequent repetition of single names (such as Uhtred or Gospatric) among the Northumbrian elites and assuming no textual mix-ups, perhaps, these two names were recycled in four generations within one kindred.[1212] In the cold light of the day, of the six names mentioned by John, only this family's *thegnly* connexion with the king can be tentatively cross-checked: King Cnut's grant of 43 *hides* to the Archbishop of York was witnessed by one Gamall and two Ormar,[1213] plus an Ormr, son of Gamall, is entered on the list of *taini regis* at the end Yorkshire folios. Did, therefore, John and *De Obsessione*'s use of LAT. *minister/tein* reflect all these Northumbrians' self-awareness of a *thegnly* status, or was it rather a learned monarchocentric *usus*? Was indeed 'the very term *thegn*, "one who serves", [...] central to their identity',[1214] or in sociological terms, their master status?

The evidence is contra-directional. On the one hand, rare and thereby all the more important texts such as the *Ordinance Concerning the* Dunsæte, *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge*, or Anglo-Saxon vernacular charters would make one think that even in matters far removed from royal concerns, some local elites did accept a collective designation as *thegns*. It should be noted, though, that such instances deal with summaries to which people thus called subscribed collectively, rather than individually had a hand in formulating them on parchment. If the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s evolving use of OE *eorl* is reflective of lexical-semantical changes in wider registers of late Old English (above, p. 199), then OE *þegn* must have undergone a similar path (points 5–7 on the numbered list in §3.4.5.1, above). This wider application of OE *þegn* could be accounted for as a result of Gramscian cultural hegemony put forth by Timothy Reuter as one of the means to assert elite status (above, p. 25). If anything, in the local elites' *Erfahrungsraum*, now to some extent shaped by royal discourse, they indeed were *thegns*.

Let us now consider the evidence of the opposite. OE *eorl* survived the linguistic domination of Latin and Norman French after 1066 AD to denote a noble title (> MIDE *ĕrl*), as

1210 JW: *s.a.* 1065 AD. Nordicised spellings of these names have been preferred.

1211 This inscription, alongside newer epigraphical finds on lead plates in 1996, was edited, published and discussed by Watts et al. 1997.

1212 Generation 1: Gamall, lived in King Æthelred's reign; generation 2: Ormr, married the daughter of Earl Ealdred (d. 1038), probably in the 1030s; generation 3: Gamall, murdered by Earl Tósti, probably *c.* 1065 AD; generation 4: Ormr, owner of St Gregory's minster and rebel against Earl Tósti, survived late into the reign of King William I. Generations 2 and 3 likely witnessed S 968.

1213 S 968 (1033 AD). Who is whose son is impossible to tell.

1214 Shapland 2019, p. 151 (n. 103).

did OE *ealdormann* (> MIDE *alder-man*) albeit demoted in the hierarchy of offices. But OE *þegn*, despite the social group to potentially designate being more numerous by a few magnitudes, yielded to concurrent (OE *cniht* > MIDE *knǐght*) and new formations (e.g., MIDE *ǧentǐl-man*). By the same token, such lexical situation *ipso facto* strongly suggests a far weaker social anchoring and internalisation of a *thegnly* master status. Lest it be forgotten, the mentions of *thegns* in the "Æthelredian annals" were penned, for all that modern scholars know, by none other than Archbishop Wulfstan, who had his own way of seeing the socium he lived in. That OE *þegn* concurred with other vernacular nouns denoting "man" in the "good/elder people" collocations and "elite *vs* rank-and-file" syndetic formulas and did not survive the Norman Conquest also suggests negotiability of the *thegnly* ontology.

In the lack of ego-documents, looking at the closest approximation of a recording of aristocrats' own voice, *viz.* wills, we are more likely to arrive at a negative conclusion as well. While (arch)bishops,[1215] kings,[1216] æthelings,[1217] ealdormen,[1218] and even reeves[1219] never failed to identify themselves on the occupational (master?) status model (above, §3.3.9), none of the testators designate themselves as "*I, X the *Thegn*", not even one from the five who we can be sure figured as *ministri* in royal diplomas.[1220] In 962 AD, one Wulfstan granted Bury St Edmunds four hides at Palgrave (Suff.); the charter to this effect overtly copied contemporaneous royal diplomas.[1221] It has been long suspected that the donor was the person otherwise known from the *Libellus Æthelwoldi*, *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi* ("The Life of St Æthelwold") and S 1457 as Wulfstan of Dalham (Suff.). The former text calls him King Edgar's "close companion" (LAT. *sequipedus*), his 'privy counsellor', and 'a man worthy of respect' (LAT. *vir venerandus*),[1222] who disposed of many *hides*. The two versions of the *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi* explicitly call him the king's *minister*[1223] who was charged to expel clerics from the Old Minster at Winchester. And yet, despite his trusted and close position and active involvement in both royal business and discourse, neither in his own grant formulated in Latin in the first person, nor as a witness in the vernacular S 1457 in the third did drafters call him "*Wulfstan, the *Thegn*". The three only times lay donors referred to themselves as *ministri*, they conditioned it by "king's" (LAT. *reg*[*al*]*is*), who they surely were.[1224] Above (pp. 116 and 166) has already been brought a case when one Lyfing – a *minister* in royal diplomas – was probably content when Kentish draftsmen identified

1215 S 1488 (1002×1005 AD; *Wills* 18), 1489 (1023×1038 AD; *Wills* 26), 1491, 1492 (1008×1012 AD), 1499 (1047×1070 AD; *Wills* 35), 1526 (942 × *c.* 951 AD; *Wills* 11).

1216 S 1507 and S 1515 (951×955 AD; *SEHD* 21).

1217 S 1503.

1218 S 1498 (977×982 AD; *Wills* 10) and S 1500.

1219 S 1482 (833×839 AD; *SEHD I*), 1485 (968×971 AD; *Wills* 9), 1508.

1220 PASE identifications: Dunn 4 (will S 1514 [*c.* 855 AD], witnessed S 314 [855 AD] and S 328); Beorhtric 8 (will S 1512 [970×981 or 984 AD]; witness and/or recipient in S 561 [953 AD], 570 [956 for ? 953×955 AD], 571 [956 AD; spurious, based on another document], 651 [958 AD], 658 [959 AD]); Wulfric 52 (*Spot*; on him, see above, p. 159) (will S 1536, witness and/or recipient in some 45 diplomas between 980 and 1004 AD); Wulfgar 11 (will S 1533, witness and/or recipient in some 52 diplomas between 928 and 948 AD); Æthelgeard 2 (will S 1496 [957 × *c.* 958 AD], witness and/or recipient in some 96 diplomas between 930 and 958 AD). The only specimen to the contrary is the spurious S 1590 (932×939 AD; Rob 27).

1221 S 1213 (962 AD).

1222 *LE*, book II, chaps 2, 28 (= S 572 [956 for 954×955 AD]), 55, pp. 73, 102, 126.

1223 Ælfric's *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*, chap 14, p. 23, and Wulfstan *Cantor*'s *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*, chap 18, p. 45 (published by Winterbottom 1972). Wulfstan's biography has been studied many times, e.g., by Wareham 2005, chap 2.

1224 S 1182 (762 AD): donor otherwise unknown; S 1194 (845 AD): donor likely re-occurs in S 190 (836 AD) and S 204; S 1206: donor discussed above (p. 152).

him just as toponymically ('of Malling') and it was only his son who was equally content with his father's occupational identification ('the *Thegn*'). The only case when a *minister*'s (or a *minister*'s son) voice has been preserved in a different medium conforms to the wills and S 1213. In the Kirkdale sundial inscription, at *Orm Gamalsvna*'s commission engravers did include Tósti and Edward's titles of earl and king, respectively, as a chronological framework. But Ormr's own status/occupation/title was not engraved in stone;[1225] rather, his patronymic served an identifier. Perhaps, though impossible to prove, in Ormr's own eyes, his *thegnly* status was an achieved one only when he attended the king's court, paid his *heriot* of £8, or was addressed in a writ. An external source such as *Domesday Book* probably corroborates this ambiguity. While OE *þegn* certainly rang the bell with the informants and commissioners, who counted as a *thegn* and who did not, apparently, was not seen as paradigmatic – not even in seemingly unambiguous situations of a local community hearing/seeing a royal writ that most definitely called its audience as "all king's *thegns* in such-and-such shire".

Two tentative explanations present themselves. One is that internalisation of *thegnly* identities by wider strata of late Anglo-Saxon secular elites was confined to superficial levels only: collective/literary/monarchical discourse, etc. Reasons as to why open a discussion that can become a topic for further research. Perhaps answers should be sought in the inner structures and mechanics of late Anglo-Saxon secular elites. For example, Peter Coss believes that they were intrinsically more vertical than horizontal and points to the absence of a common, national forum (such as the later Parliament) that could have served a venue to work out and disseminate such identities, while in shire courts, in his opinions, top magnates played the first fiddle.[1226] The other explanation has to do with sources. The proverbial elephant in the room is a serious asymmetry of available Anglo-Saxon records (above, §3.2.1.1). We cannot exclude that hard-and-fast quantitative written evidence to *thegnly* master status simply has not been preserved, if it existed at all.

Most important and, perhaps, insufficiently reflected in historiography is the marked chronological span when OE *þegn* stripped of *any* genetive appurtenances suddenly found itself applied to elites beyond the documentary product of royal chancery alone and then stopped. The lower boundary by the 970s or shortly before, as attested by a land purchase of Kingston Bagpuize (above, n. 679) and foregone by the monarchocentric Colyton laws, grant to Ælfsige Hunlafing, and the Andover law-code, follows from the preceding socio-political development elucidated above. The upper boundary is conceivable with the view of massive displacements in English landowning strata after the Norman Conquest.[1227] It is easiest to explain it as the time when the last individuals, referred to as *thegns* by contemporaries, disappeared from social landscape en masse, given 'the thoroughness with which the ruling élite of pre-Conquest England was expunged by their Norman supplanters'.[1228] The word *thegn* did survive, of course, as MIDE *thein*[1229] and found idiosyncratic use in Scotland, likely

1225 'Orm, son of Gamal, bought St Gregory's church when it was completely ruined and collapsed, and he had it constructed recently from the ground to Christ and St Gregory, in the days of King Edward and in the days of Earl Tosti [*IN EADWARD : DAGVM : CÑG ⁊ TOSTI: DAGVM : EORL*]. And Hawarð made me and Brand the priest' (Watts et al. 1997, p. 81).
1226 Coss 2003, pp. 29–33.
1227 Baxter and Lewis 2017 (esp. pp. 401–403).
1228 Williams 2008, p. viii.
1229 MED (*s.v.* "thein").

through Norman mediation.[1230] But in medieval England, the individuals thus called seem to have ceased to be a social phenomenon and the word got confined as an archaism to literary genres until its retirement and eventual re-introduction from Scots centuries later.

3.5 Conclusion: The Sociology of an Anglo-Saxon *Thegn*

The analysis above has addressed many complementary diachronic facets of OE *þegn* as a word and Anglo-Saxon *thegns* as historical figures. It now calls for a synthesis that could appear most meaningful when carried out along a diachronic trajectory. This synthesis should tie in together the answers to the lexicographical and socio-historical research Questions 1–2 and broach the subject of Anglo-Saxon *thegns* as a self-aware social group under this name.

3.5.1 From Servant to Highborn

Given the nature of extant sources, the most consistent conclusion is that in the early medieval English pre-Conquest history, as a term in actual Anglo-Saxon socio-political landscape OE *þegn* had always remained a rather monarch-oriented lexical tool to describe top-down social relationships and power structures. Coincidently or not, it treaded into the fore already with the first record of OE *þegn* in Kings Ine and Wihtred's law-codes and ties in well with the recent suggested etymological reconstructions (see Excursus 1). Importantly, with only inconclusive non-literary evidence of OE *þegn*'s application to historical Anglo-Saxon figures in non-royal service, suppositions must rely on the hints in other genres. In them, such literary characters exhibit only one relevant feature that would set them aside as a social category, *viz*. neutrality of service.[1231] In this aspect I do not see eye to eye with preceding historiography on the assumption that every commended man of any lord would invariably be styled *thegn*. Other lexemes enjoyed a fair share of use: OE *cniht*, *mann*, LAT. *homo*, *fidelis*, etc. If anything, to judge from later Middle English use, OE *cniht* rather took this role. Consequenly, the occasional use of OE *þegn* for non-royal aristocratic clients seems to have hardly had much effect on the composition or structure of Anglo-Saxon networks of social power at large.

The second part of Chapter 3 and the elucidated answers to research Question 2 corroborate that the intensification and expansion of royal power between shortly before 900 and 1000 AD and onwards brought about redistribution of social power in the socio-political landscape. The authority and prestige of a Cerdicing king went hand in hand with the subordination of all independent alternative political centres in the first half of the century. The number of people in royal service, and the importance placed on them, as revealed by the cited royal legislation, grew proportionally as well. Magnates' attraction to the king and his vested interest in attracting them to his side by offering them patronage and "friendship" in return for their *thegnship* must have surely been mutual. These dualistic progressions were probably so mutually codetermined that attempting to discern

1230 Scottish thanes are beyond the scope of this study. Interested readers can find thorough research by Taylor 2016, chap 1 (esp. pp. 54–69).

1231 Military service might be counted as the potentially second common attribute, but it is less ubiquitous in the sources. A reservation must be made, though, that the military aspect, as discussed above, came into play only in specific circumstances. Nevertheless, including martial aspects on the list of socially relevant features of all *thegns* as a social category may be premature: OE *þegn* clearly proliferated in non-militaristic context just as well.

the precise cause and catalyst is better saved for future research. The present study has revealed that at least at the earlier stages, as shown for King Edward the Elder's handling of the "Danelaw" elites, the Cerdicings had an upper hand in this process and dictating conditions. Regardless of what- and whoever the ultimate driving force in these social shifts was, their conceptualisation relied on the lexical-conceptual framework of royal lordship. Nor is there any evidence for kings adapting their originally West Saxon language of royal lordship and power to local circumstances.

The dissemination of this doctrine of a notionally top-down social power, latched onto a Cerdicing king, and its language was likely channelled through royal documentation of three (known) types. The tradition of graciously issuing title-deeds to land for beneficiaries emphatically called their OE *þegnas* by royal donors had been well-entrenched since at least the 9th century, as evinced by the Mersham–*Wassingwell* exchange in Kent and King Beorhtwulf's grant to Forthred in Buckinghamshire. But a breakaway quantitative upscaling began in King Æthelstan's reign, culminating in 956 AD and then waning in the next decade and on.[1232] The start of this boom in the 930s also in all probability coincided with the earliest *terminus ante quem* by when "king's *thegns* of such-and-such community" had become a stock designation of a local elite in the royal correspondence with localities,[1233] potentially already ongoing for a few decades, as hinted at by the Alfredian literature. It is impossible to definitively prove with tangible evidence in hand that this standard writ formula was regularly employed in the 10th century in the physical medium it is later known from. But the extant and indisputably genuine writs that start from King Cnut's reign make an impression of an already fully developed documentary form. It was, in fact, so stable that it would not undergo significant changes even after the Conquest (except for switching languages, while still preserving all constituent elements intact). This, in turn, strongly suggests a preceding stage at which such formulae could have circulated far and wide (see also above, n. 410) – in (whatever form of) writing or orally.

Most people called *thegns* by kings in such correspondence nevertheless did not receive personal grants, especially east of the provisional Wirral–Thames estuary line, nor did many locals from here come to royal assemblies. Royal lordship spread over them, it has been hypothesised off the concrete case in the *Fonthill Letter*, when the Cerdicings began encumbering the freest forms of land tenure ("bookland", "sake and soke"), some of which may have had earlier come from previous kings. If, as a non-conventional interpretation of the Alfred–Guthrum treaty may very tentatively suggest, such proprietors in a royal outlook were becoming "king's *thegns*" in the years around 900 AD, it took well over four decades for lexical genitival markers to start losing their obligatoriness, to judge from royal legislation. Such omissions, it may be, reflected a loosening obligatoriness of personal *Königsnähe*, as in the case of the lower segments of the "Danelaw" elite, and an increasing force of territorial-tenurial elements as the cornerstone for royal power. Thus, even though at the start of the late Anglo-Saxon period not all local elites used to be initially tied to kings through personal commendation and/or service, they too were not only exposed to and affected by this language of royal lordship in diplomas, writs, and law-codes, but increasingly became the intended audience. The increasing role of a territorial dimension in exclusive royal

1232 I have elsewhere discussed this process and the likely objective side to the proportional peaks and wanes on a chronological graph (Sukhino-Khomenko 2022, pp. 220–226, esp. fig. 3).

1233 See the evidence collected and analysed by Keynes 1990.

lordship in addition to the inherent personal contributed to a simultaneous widening of the kings' referent group from direct liegemen to Ann Williams's 'everyone who mattered' was probably paving the way for OE *þegn*'s rarer sense "king's subject".

As a consequence, it is permissible to talk of the ennoblement of OE *þegn*, which in and of itself had previously carried no distinct semantics of nobility or aristocracy. People with such social attributes *could* become kings' *thegns* before, too, but there are no demonstrative signs that such service led to ennoblement in the earliest period in and of itself. On-hand texts would suggest that the tables started to turn sometime between the Colyton ordinance in the mid-940s and Andover legislation of the mid-960s. The results became increasingly visible first in the following decades, when such social attributes became associated with OE *þegn* to a degree that the word became a self-sufficient way to denote low- and mid-tier local lay social elite in pre-existing syndetic contrastive formulae and rhyming jingles of the "elite *vs* rank-and-file" type and "good/elder people" collocations. Originally steadfast, "masculine" behaviour, appropriate for Tacitean *comitatus* virtues and *Erwartungshorizont* was first conceptualised at about the same time in the form of OE *þegenlīc*(*e*). By *c.* 1000 AD, these lexemes widened to connote ethically noble conduct, honesty, and uprightness, and became expected of people in real life. Whereas Bede's Alfredian translator's *thegns* demonstrate noble habitus and are of noble extraction and therefore seek royal service,[1234] Ælfric's *thegns* are well-born aristocrats irrespective of it.[1235] It is, of course, not to say that high birth and royal service had become antagonistic, though (above, p. 115).[1236] When those among the Norman intelligentsia with a taste for jurisprudence set out to translate and interpret the Anglo-Saxon legal heritage, this shift was a *fait accompli*. Not only did

1234 Bede recounted (*OEHE*, book III, chap 23, pp. 326–330) how one Imma, a *thegn* of the Northumbrian King Ecgfrith (r. *c.* 645–685), had been rendered unconscious in a battle. Upon capture by the Mercians, Imma feared repressions and 'declared that he was a man of the people, poor and married' (*sæde, þæt he folclic mon wære ⁊ þearfende ⁊ gewiifad hæfde*). His deceit did not pass unnoticed because his habitus – the way he looked, behaved, and spoke (*of his ondwlitan ⁊ on gebærum ⁊ eac swylce on his wordum*) – betrayed aristocratic descent (*he wæs æðele strynde*, here translating Bede's original LAT. *erat* […] *de nobilibus*; *HE*, book IV, chap 22, p. 402). Characterising another king's *thegn* by the name of Tilmon who later became a monk, Bede also remarked that he 'was a man of note, of noble birth also in the world' (*wæs* […] *méere wer ⁊ for weorulde ec swylce æðelre gebyrde*; *OEHE*, book V, chap 11, p. 418; here translating LAT. *uiro inlustri et ad saeculum quoque nobili* (*HE*, book V, chap 10, p. 482). Finally, extolling the Northumbrian King Oswine's (d. 651) rule, Bede noted that 'the noblest flocked to join his retinue and service, from almost every quarter in all the adjoining provinces' (*æghwonan lytesne of eallum þissum bifylcum to his folgaðe ⁊ his þegnunge þa æþelestan men cwomon*; *OEHE*, book III, chap 14, pp. 194–196; here translating LAT. *undique ad eius ministerium de cunctis prope prouinciis uiri etiam nobilissimi concurrerent*; *HE*, book III, chap 14, pp. 256–258).

1235 Philip, father of St Eugenia, under Ælfric's pen, becomes *sum æþel-boren þægn* ('a highborn *thegn*'; *LS* I, *St Eugenia*, p. 44 [l. 5]). St Julian, according to the Abbot, was *sum æðele godes ðegn on Egypta lande, on antiochian þære byrig, se wæs æðelboren of æwfestum magum* ('a noble *thegn* of God in Egypt, in the city of Antioch. He was nobly born of pious parents'; *LS* I, *St Julian and Basilissa*, p. 124 [ll. 1–4]). Where Lantfred in his *Translatio et Miracvla S. Swithvni* (chap 16) narrates a story of a miraculous recovery of 'a certain man born of noble kin, abounding in excessive wealth' (*uir quidam nobili ortus prosapie, habundans opibus perplurimis*; Lapidge 2003b, p. 298), Ælfric writes about 'a *thegn* [...], very rich in possessions' (*Sum þegn wæs* […] *on æhtum swyðe welig*; *LS* II, *St Swithun*, p. 218 [l. 193]; for demonstrative purposes, I allowed myself to alter the original translations and maintain "*thegn*").

1236 Three versions of the anonymous homily on St Martin make the saint of 'good and noble birth' (*swiðe gódra gebyrda and æðelra*) and serve Emperors Constantine and Julian, following in the footsteps of his father, himself 'first the king's' *thegn* and then 'a commander of the king's' *thegns* (*érest cyninges ðegen* […] *cyninges ðægna ealdorman*; Mertens 2017, p. 180). The date of the homily cannot be established with any certainty beyond the date of the manuscripts and must be the second half of the 10th century at the earliest. Andre Mertens allows a potentially broad dating range beginning from the conversion era, so it is not excluded that it reflects earlier lexical-conceptual complex.

they feel at ease to render OE *þegn* as LAT. *nobilis*,[1237] but also to voluntarily add an equation between "twelve-hundreders" and *thegns*,[1238] until the eventual merger of all three under the pen of the author of the *Leges Henrici Primi* (*c.* 1100×1108 AD):

> A twelve-hundred man is a person of noble rank, that is, a thegn, whose wergeld is twelve hundred shillings, which equal twenty-five pounds.[1239]

In the Venn diagram on the conceptual map presented at Figure 1, then, his *thegns* for the first time stand at the intersection between the elite, aristocracy, and nobility, with none of the three being the leading quality.

3.5.2 Re-Enter Archbishop Wulfstan

Having dissected other evidence, we now should re-integrate Archbishop Wulfstan's vivid interpretation of who counted as an Anglo-Saxon *thegn* and why.

Despite the criticism in CHAPTER 2 (§2.2.2), it is unwise to utterly deny his texts historical value as a source on late Anglo-Saxon social organisation. A lot of what the Archbishop mentioned has parallels or echo in other evidence, such as landed proprietorship, churches in *thegnly* estates, royal service, or perhaps even remains of the five-*hide* system, if it ever was designed with universality in mind. But it is equally dangerous to take his descriptions as truly normative. Worst of all with the other sources sits Wulfstan's repetitive insistence on a self-sufficient *thegnly* status as a legally enforced and recognised fact, a noble legal rank. Only Anglo-Norman texts leastwise half a century removed from the Conquest make similar claims. But the *post hoc non ergo propter hoc* methodological principle should argue against a straightforward retrojection of the Anglo-Norman interpretations, lexical use, or indeed legal realities onto the pre-1066 state. This is not least because the anonymous author of the *Leges Henrici Primi* was familiar with Wulfstan's corpus and hence could have recycled the Archbishop's language (and vision?). As for the appearance of OE *þegn* in the "elite *vs* rank-and-file" formula in place of OE *twelfhynde* and opposition to OE *ceorlas*, a lot of leaps may be required to support Wulfstan's claims. For one, we will need to posit a strict terminological use for such formulae plus an indiscriminate and throughout synonymity of lexemes in them. For the other, we will need to ignore the few but nonetheless valuable testimonies that *thegns* could have been both *twelf-* and *twihynde* or *comites et villani*. The simpler solution is to prioritise the aristocratic attributes of the elite in such formulae over legally noble ones, which then neatly falls in line with OE *þegn*'s overall semantic development traced in CHAPTER 3. That no *thegn* ever enjoyed an exalted *wergild* is probably going too far. But claiming that *all* of them invariably did places much trust in non-problem-free evidence. Simply put, in his vision of a "holy society", Wulfstan reduced the *thegnly* status to a set of formal criteria, whereas in practice it rested on a plethora of social factors more so than on legal definitions.

1237 In S 1404 (1045×1048 AD), a translator went for LAT. *omnibus nobilibus* for the supposed OE **ealle þegnas* that we may posit in the not preserved original. The translator responsible for Canterbury bilingual version (F) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* used LAT. *nobilis* where the original read *thegns* (*ASC*: 1010, 1015, 1028, 1036 AD [MS F]).

1238 This occurs in *Instituta Cnuti*'s version of Af 39:2 and in the reading of Ine 70 in the *Leges Henrici Primi* (Hn 69:2).

1239 *T[w]elfhindus est homo plene nobilis, id est thainus cuius wera est duodecies* C *solidi qui faciunt libras* XXV (Hn 76:4a). *Cf.* John of Worcester's characterisation of rebellious Northumbrian *thegns* as noble (above, p. 214).

What drove Wulfstan to conceptualise contemporaneous *thegns* as a status group in such stringent terms not really found anywhere else? One can think of two provisional motives, probably complementary of each other. One is Wulfstan's well-researched ideological pursuit for orderliness. In the age of wide-scale political and social turmoil and decimation of lay elite[1240] caused by the viking expansion in the British Isles, insistence on social regularity agrees exceptionally well with Wulfstan's permeating 'concern with social status [and] disgust for the disregard of proper social order'.[1241] The other is rooted in geography and chronology of his socialising writings. The *Compilation on Status* where Wulfstan's views concerning *thegns* got best developed, came out of his pen after his promotion to the see of York. It is hard to miss that these views of his are patently West Saxon and endow the king an important role in shaping the social conditions. As will be hypothesised below (§5.3.2), perhaps, Wulfstan was incentivised to theorise on the place *thegns* should hold in society exactly upon confronting local northern Anglo-Scandinavian social norms so much deviating from what he had been exposed to in the South.

Wulfstan, it seems, tried to regularise and compartmentalise the multifarious social realities associated with *thegns*. To use a 19th-century ethnologic analogy, Wulfstan engaged in participant observation. Current researchers, while giving due to academic pioneers and the raw data they collected, are cautious in accepting their explanatory paradigms and schematics though, especially when a pre-conceived theoretical framework informed those participant observers' field work.[1242] Wulfstan's conceptualisation of *thegns* produces a set of neat and tidy social rules. But it is not clear that this was the idealistic Rankian maxim *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. The tone and message of Wulfstan's texts compare him not with an impartial onlooker but rather an active contributor to a wider discourse.

To use the same cross-disciplinary analogy, with the source-critical reasons presented above (§2.2.3) in hand, it is advisable to reconsider Wulfstan's texts' tenability as the go-to "reference model" of an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*. The evidence analysed throughout this chapter suggests that Wulfstan's signals of a *thegnly* status cohere with concomitants in Thomas Charles-Edwards's triad of causes, consequences, and concomitants of social status (above, p. 46). Indeed, unencumbered (hereditary) title to land ('fully five hides of his own property'), prominence in both ecclesiastical and secular landscape due to eye-catching residential compounds ('a church and kitchen, a bell house and fortified gate'), expensive military equipment ('a helmet and a coat of mail and a gold-plated sword') make a lot of sense as noticeable displays of one's conspicuous social superiority – now corollary of, now antecedent to royal service ('an appointed role in the king's hall', 'wait[ing] upon the king and r[iding] on his business[1243] among his retinue'). All these outward markers fit neatly one of Bougard and colleagues' key points about practical expressions of an achieved elite status: habitus, culture, lifestyle (above, p. 25). Wulfstan shared with the author of MS Bodley 343 a characterisation of this façade of social thriving as "*thegnship*" (above, p. 114). Only with his fixation on orderliness Wulfstan presented these concomitants of social status as its causes. A tell-tale trace of this conceptual swap is his lexical choice of OE (*ge*)*þēon* (lit. to prosper) in *Geþyncðu* and reiteration of insufficiency to just own high-end

1240 Mack 1984.
1241 Pons-Sanz 2007a, p. 173.
1242 A prime, though hardly sole example of critique in this vein is a polemic study by Sneath 2007. I am very thankful to Henrik Janson for mentioning this thought-provoking work to me.
1243 On OE *rādstefn*, see below, (§5.3.2).

weaponry or be the first landed proprietor in a family. We will do little wrong to read these obtrusions of his as a proof of the contrary to the Archbishop's careful presentation. One can imagine that in the time of thinning out ranks of the established lay Anglo-Saxon elites, many aspiring *ceorlisce* "parvenus" must have risen to fill in the gaps in the social fabric and actively emulated elite praxes of the "old money". Unlike the widely circulating historiographical *topos* that Wulfstan was describing social lifts and mobility, and with due recognition of a wider context of his works, Nicholas Banton's statement that,

> [f]ar from showing how flexible Anglo-Saxon society was, Wulfstan's laws stress the barriers to change. The preservation of status was a great preoccupation of his,[1244]

– reads much more reflective of the Archbishop's intentions and agenda.

With these adjustments to the understanding of the *Compilation on Status*, it makes a good sense in relation to the question posed at the beginning of this section. This and other texts by Wulfstan described not what the late Anglo-Saxon society invariably looked like across the board, but what one intellectual desired to make of it in his ideologeme of a proper social order. In a sense, Wulfstan and not Sharon Turner was the first scholar to study *thegns*, and he practically pioneered it what in §2.2.1.3 was summarised as a "descriptive approach", though as he was wont, in deceptively "prescriptive" terms. Perhaps and to give Wulfstan due credit, his writings should be appreciated not only as a source but equally as historiography, if less removed from the object of study, about Anglo-Saxon *thegns*.

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Should a contemporary historian side with king-oriented Old English writers, such as Wulfstan, in the modern use of OE *þegn*, they might involuntarily perpetuate, to paraphrase, a historical narrative of the kings, by the kings, and for the kings. Moreover, we might see too strong a master status where it was much more amorphous and negotiable. Conversely, if one discards as nit-picky the reservations about the extent of internalisation and hence about the widespread existence of a *thegnly* historical ontology, one should at least acknowledge the Cerdicings' hand in shaping it in a concrete chronological span and abandon across-the-board characterisation of *any* secular Anglo-Saxon elite as *thegns*, irrespective of time period and geographic region. At any rate, should our modern analytical lexicon keep "*thegn*", maybe, future historical research would benefit from redefining this word and an acknowledgement of its bias. A "*thegn*" is in origin a pronouncedly monarchocentric social term that stemmed from a personal relationship. While an inferior in it appeared a *thegn* to the superior, to the inferior's own subordinates he rather appeared as (land)lord (OE *landrīca,* [*land*]*hlāford*), patron (OE *mundbora*), headman (OE *hēafodman*), soke-holder (**se þe his socne ahe*), or something else altogether. To Domesday commissioners, he could have been a "free man" or an "allodiary". The answer to the question introduced at the beginning of this chapter, "who was an Anglo-Saxon *thegn*?", and echoed in John Gillingham's article title,[1245] is thus perhaps itself a question: 'Depends on who's writing. Who's asking?'

1244 Banton 1981, pp. 279–280.
1245 '*Thegns* and Knights in Eleventh-Century England: Who Was Then the Gentleman?'.

Chapter 4
Thegn in Scandinavia: The Word and the People

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the *thegnly* phenomenon in late Viking-Age Scandinavia. Available sources, however, dictate three crucial differences from the preceding chapter. First, as previously briefly noted, Old Danish and Swedish texts are woefully underrepresented in the overall corpus (see below, §4.2.1). Second, Old Norse prose texts are by far more contextually informative than skaldic poetry. But they postdate the period synchronous with the one studied in Chapter 3 by some 150 years and more (discussed below, §4.2.1.2). Therefore, at the suggested *first stage* of research and addressing the lexicographical research Question 1 to position ON *þegn* in the social linguistic framework, §4.3 will have to work back from the semasiological contextual identification of medieval Old West Norse *þegn*'s lexical meanings to relate them to earlier Old East Norse runic *þegn*, the result remaining approximate only. Third, whereas in England the study of the word *þegn*'s realisation in the social circumstances could rely equally on literary and documentary genres from this region, the latter option is unavailable across the North Sea. ON *þegn* does occur in Norwegian royal documentation, such as legal amendments (ON *réttarbætr*, sing. *réttarbót*), and ON compound *þegngildi* does indeed figure in medieval charters. However, both are just formulaic elements, not applied to concrete named figures. Within literary genres, moreover, few individuals are characterised as *thegns*. More often than not the word enjoys use in plural and collective senses, and the legal material, for that matter, speaks of generalised and idealised social roles. Therefore, at the proposed *second stage* of research, in its answer to research Question 2 regarding *thegns* economic, social, political, and legal features, §4.4 will aim to compensate for these shortcomings by various means. Two skaldic poems associate *thegns* with a particular Scandinavian type of landed property, the odal. While also in context of interaction with monarchy, unlike the Anglo-Saxon *thegns* and bookland, the association does not appear driven by a monarchocentric discourse. This in turn also opens the doors for the opposite approach, *viz.* an onomasiological circumscription of a variously-named social category of Viking-Age aristocratic landed proprietors, especially in view of the aforementioned shortcomings. §§4.4.2–3 will do so based on strict and empirically-selected criteria looping back to *thegns* and at the same time integrating the object of study into wider socio-political contexts. With those caveats in sight, the chapter seeks to address the question: "who was a Scandinavian *thegn*?" – similar to the one in the preceding chapter. The proposed answer will bear on the lexical-runological problem of this study inasmuch as it will remain an educated and motivated but at present still an approximative extrapolation: chronologically backwards and geographically south.

4.2 Sources and Applied Methodology

4.2.1 Overview of Sources

As a linguistic taxonomic term, "Old Norse" is more elastic than "Old English". MODE adjective *Norse* (< Dutch *noors/noorsch*? and/or < Scots *Norse*?) is at present an obsolete synonym for "Norwegian" that gained popularity in the 1860s. At that time it was spoken, educated speakers called it the "Danish tongue" (ON *dǫnsk tunga*)[1246] or "northern speech" (ON *norrønt mál*).[1247] Modern speakers of the languages descended from its western branch – Norwegian and Icelandic – usually call it *norrønt* and (*forn*)*norræna* or *forníslenska*, respectively; speakers of the eastern descendants – Danish and Swedish – know it as *oldnordisk* and *fornnordiska*, accordingly (though *norrønt/norrön* are popular, too). Old Norse is mostly represented by specimens of its western forms in Norwegian and especially Icelandic manuscripts,[1248] which is why classical Old Norse effectively covers the linguistic features of its western strand (hence "Old Icelandic" is another popular synonym). An acknowledgement of this fact has given rise to a hyphenated compound "Old Norse–Icelandic", especially in discussions of textual cultures,[1249] which below will be used interchangeably with "Old West Norse" as opposed to "Old East Norse" wherever the situation calls for it. Otherwise, "Old Norse" will be taken as an umbrella term for the North Germanic language and its dialects spoken in mainland and insular Scandinavia from the Early to High Middle Ages. The exact date at which time Old Norse diverges into related but manifestly different tongues is, of course, elusive. For purposes of this study, a delimitation line is drawn at *c.* 1300 AD, and later original texts written will be of secondary interest as they are hardly illustrative of the Viking Age.

APPENDIX 3.3 presents all corpora entries singled out for the current chapter. Their categorisation differed somewhat from its Old English counterpart, generally followed a similar template:

- First, all entries were assigned the attribute of textual *format*. Unlike Old English, none of the online corpora listed ON *þegn* among glosses, and so there remain only two formats: prose and poetry.
- Then, prose and poetic texts were assigned *types* – religious and secular. Because ON *þegn* was registered in the *Poetic Edda*, the religious type further consists of two: non-Christian mythological poetry and Christian religious poetry. These were considered two self-sufficient types rather than subtypes of one supertype.

1246 Palm 2010, p. 330; Phelpstead 2020, p. 11; Jesch 2015, pp. 75–77. It occurs in, e.g., a poem by the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Grágás* ("The Grey Goose"), and *Fyrsta Málfræðiritgerðin* ("The First Grammatical Treatise"), but could have been inspired by the English way of collectively calling the Northern Germanic idioms.

1247 It occurs in, e.g., *Heimskringla* ("The Circle of the World") and *Rímbelga*. I would like to thank Daria Segal for pointing this out to me.

1248 For perspective, Iceland features 868 vernacular manuscripts before *c.* 1600 AD (Friðriksdóttir 2020, p. 90; the upper chronological boundary of Old Norse is much later than in mainland Scandinavia due to Icelandic's exceptional conservatism), of them 'just over a hundred [...] from before about 1300' (Phelpstead 2020, p. 45; note that at p. 44, he provides a different number for Icelandic manuscripts overall: ca. 750 between the mid-12th and mid-16th centuries) and Norway preserved more than 125 before *c.* 1350 AD. By contrast, Old Swedish texts are represented only by 28 manuscripts (24 of them with laws), and comparable 30 manuscripts or so contain Old Danish from *c.* 1250 to *c.* 1350 AD (Bandle et al. 2002, chap X:90–94).

1249 Ross 2010, pp. 13–14.

- At the next stage, entries were sorted according to *genre*. In this instance it has to be admitted that any genre classification is provisional and may be discussed.[1250] Some genres can be said to be more discrete than others. For example, *Duggals Leizla* ("The Leading of Tnugdali") easily falls into the genre of visionary literature.[1251] But border cases exist as well. Texts included in Carl Unger's (1817–1897) editions *Postula Sögur* (1874) and *Heilagra Manna Sögur* (1877) were grouped together as the prose hagiography, rather than as sagas in the modern sense. Conversely, the two redactions of Icelandic patron saint Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson's (d. 1193) life saga were categorised with other "Contemporary sagas" (IC. *samtíðarsögur*), namely the bishops' sagas. Another hard case is that of three vernacular synoptic histories of Norway: *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasǫgum* ("Summary of the Norwegian Kings' Sagas"), *Morkinskinna* ("Mouldy Parchment"), and *Fagrskinna*. Thematically, they may be categorised with other "kings' sagas" (ON *konunga sǫgur*) as they contain them and some were later recycled in further specimens of this genre. But unlike the kings' sagas, these three texts tell a cohesive (monarchical) history(-ies) of early medieval Norway rather than only a biography of one ruler each. For this reason, *Ágrip*, *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* were assigned to the historical narrative genre rather than sagas proper. With this approach, 12 genres among relevant sources were itemised.
- Sagas are a unique Old Norse textual genre. Up to this day debates rage as to how they ought to be classified and to what purpose, stepping into which will not contribute to the current study. Nevertheless, with due acknowledgement of the discussion, it was decided to further introduce *saga thematical categories* as an additional attribute, and these were generally followed from previous works.[1252] Altogether, the relevant sagas were broken into 9 thematical categories.
- Lastly, *elements* in individual sources made up the final attribute. The same caveats as with Old English treatments remained. Critics may point out preferentiality in separating various sagas in *Heimskringla* as discrete elements (and not, say, individual sources in their own right; or not grouping *Heimskringla* with other synoptic histories) but not isolating as such individual stanzas in skaldic poems, while also treating individual charters as elements of one general source – documentary texts.

This classification yielded entries in 239 elements of 167 unique sources. Of this number, only one element may be older than about 900 AD or earlier: the skaldic poem *Haustlǫng* ("Autumn-Long") by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (lived in the late 9th – early 10th centuries); 13 elements come from the 10th century; further 16 elements from the 11th century; 11 elements from the 12th century; finally, 40 elements from the 13th century, and the datable rest are younger.

1250 The subject, in application to saga genres more specifically, was recently broach by prof. Massimiliano Bampi in his public lecture "Defining Old Norse Saga Genres" Problems and Perspectives" at the University of Lisbon (Centre for Classical Studies and Centre for English Studies) on 20 April 2023. Among other items, prof. Bampi raised the issue of how to define "genre" for starters, with various answers by Hans Jauss, Norman Ingham, and Simon Gaunt, all of which proved the constructed nature of genre as literary methodological instrument.

1251 Heide 2016.

1252 Ross 2005, pp. 27–36; Bampi 2017. Ross's modern Icelandic and Old Norse spelling preferences, depending on the attestations in actual sources, will also find application below: thus, e.g., *fornaldarsögur* as a modern analytical term introduced by Carl Rafn (1795–1863) (Bampi 2017, p. 11 [n. 6]) but *konunga sǫgur* as a registered original collocation.

This numerical breakdown generally aligns with the written history of Old Norse. In script, the Old Norse of the Viking Age is represented by epigraphic runic inscriptions in the younger futhark that emerged sometime between *c.* 700 and *c.* 800 AD.[1253] With the adoption of Christianity, a modified Latin alphabet gradually replaced runes, and the first extant vernacular manuscripts lie on either side of *c.* 1150 AD (the Icelandic AM, MS 732 VII 4° and the Norwegian AM, MS 655 IX 4°).[1254] The next century witnessed a boom in vernacular literary production, especially in Old Norse–Icelandic textual community, but this is also the time of the first extant Danish and Swedish manuscripts.

Cumulative indirect evidence suggests that the oldest extant 12th-century Old Norse manuscripts could not be the first ever produced[1255] and, importantly, that textual formats, types, and genres known later are supposedly older than the extant manuscripts. Since this study concerns a much earlier period, a difficult problem hard to circumvent is the retrospective bearing certain Old Norse medieval texts have on the Viking Age.[1256]

4.2.1.1 poetic textual format

Generally, skaldic (rarely spelt "scaldic") court poetry is, perhaps, least contentious. The corpus is estimated by the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* project's website at 5,825 stanzas in 719 manuscripts, making it one of the largest bodies of medieval vernacular poetry;[1257] of this mass, ca. 1,750 stanzas ostensibly belong to the Viking Age.[1258] Since skaldic poetry is by definition authorial and in many cases concrete skalds' authorship is given (twenty-eight skalds made it into the relevant corpus), dating these texts finds at least notional historical fulcra. An exceptional commemorative runic inscription in the *dróttkvætt* metre – to which roughly five out of every six skaldic stanzas belong[1259] – on the Karlevi stone (Öl 1; the island of Öland, *c.* 1000 AD) indicates the late Viking-Age origins of this poetic meter at the latest.[1260] Nevertheless, the common mode of transmission of these verses was prosimetrical, i.e. by incorporation in prose texts as modern scholars

1253 On the chronology of Old Norse and its evolution from preceding linguistic stages, which exceeds the scope of the current excursus, see, e.g., Bandle et al. 2002, chaps VIII–IX; Barnes 2005.

1254 In English, the effects that the new written culture had are discussed by, e.g., Lönnroth 2011; Mundal 2019, and also in other previous publications by the last mentioned author. There is physical evidence of Scandinavian (Danish and Norwegian) Latin manuscripts production in the early 12th century (MS Lund, UB Mh 6, also known as *Necrologum Lundense*, the oldest parts probably finished by 1123 AD) and even late 11th century (GKS, MS 1325 4°, the Dalby Gospel Book, paleographically dated to the second half of the 11th century; Wellendorf 2019, p. 113 [n. 1]). It has also been speculated that some Latin books were brought to Scandinavia even earlier, but hard evidence is wanting. Again, I owe these facts to Daria Segal.

1255 E.g., *Óláfsløg*'s supposed recording in 1083 AD (below, n. 1702) has been proposed as the earliest Scandinavian vernacular document, with a popular belief in the Norwegian *lex scripta* already and thanks to King Óláfr Haraldsson's missionary activity (Wellendorf 2019, p. 113 [n. 2]).

1256 *Cf.* a concise example off Icelandic sources of a readily use of them for such retrospective reconstructions by Karlsson 2005, though by far not the only one.

1257 Ross 2005, p. 6.

1258 Palm 2010, p. 313. By the early 2020s, the body of scholarship on skaldic subjects has become too large for any attempt at recounting it in one footnote. Condensed introductions in English include, e.g., Jesch 2001, p. 15–33; Whaley 2005; Ross 2005, pp. 13–18. An introduction into Old Norse manuscripts (though first of all in a discussion of sagas) is available in: Ross 2010, pp. 140–152. For detailed discussions of skaldic verse preservation, transmission, and beyond, readers may consult respective sections in the *SkP* volumes, especially 'General Introduction' in *SkP* I:1 (at pp. xiii–xciii).

1259 Phelpstead 2020, p. 32.

1260 Jesch 2001, pp. 1–6. *SkP* VI is intended to cover all runic poetry in the future.

have them.[1261] While a very strict straitjacket of metrical rules facilitated oral transmission before committing skaldic stanzas to parchment, 'manuscripts give plentiful evidence of corruption and variation', and so constant caution must be exerted because

> [...] there can be a temporal gap of as much as four centuries between the putative date of composition and the earliest manuscript text of a given verse.[1262]

By and large, stanzas in *konunga sǫgur* are usually treated as more or less authentic, and those in *Íslendingasögur* cause more trouble.[1263]

The anonymous Eddic (more rarely spelt "Eddaic") mythological poetry is represented, first and foremost, by a unique multi-composed manuscript *Codex Regius* (GKS, MS 2365 4°), dated to *c.* 1275 AD and copied from an earlier exemplar. This collection commonly passes as the *Poetic Edda* in wider parlance. Other texts to include individual specimens of Eddic poetry are Snorri Sturluson's (*c.* 1179–1241) *Prose Edda*, some legendary sagas (IC. *fornaldarsögur*), and three historical compilations.[1264] In their present form, Eddic poems are of demonstrably various origin and chronology relative to each other. Dating them has been a challenge for generations of scholars.[1265] Some elements, metrical techniques, motifs, names, characters, and their collisions no doubt must have an oral pre-history in the first millennium AD and familiar to other Germanic-speaking peoples too. With heated debates still ongoing, on a general level there applies the Swedish philologist and literary scholar Lars Lönnroth's proposition to 'be content with an acknowledgment' that some Eddic parts are linguistically older and others younger and that absolute pre-Christian *vs* post-conversion datings, sadly, cannot be final.[1266] On a practical level, as in the case of Old English poetry and Robert Fulk's titanic labour, this book relies on the American linguist Christopher Sapp's latest-to-date, mathematically-supported chronological grid of dating linguistic features for every individual Eddic poem,[1267] though voices of philological criticism might reasonably be raised.

That being said, just like in Anglo-Saxon England, poetry functioned as a separate and self-contained linguistic register. Speakers of Old Norse were fully conscious of the disparity between "the language of poetry" (ON *skáldskaparmál*) and everyday *usus*, so that the earliest Icelandic laws even stipulated that,

> Every word is to be as it is spoken. No word is to be taken according to the language of poetry.[1268]

1261 A study by O'Donoghue 2005 highlights this interplay between prose and poetry in Old Norse–Icelandic literature. See also a *Quellenkunde* historiographic review of the potential of skaldic verse, exemplified by the case of King Óláfr Haraldsson's dynastic origins, by Myrvoll 2014.

1262 Whaley 2005, p. 488. In the 2000s, a discussion on the viability of skaldic verse as a source for the Viking Age unfolded between Lund 2006 (with references to earlier polemics) and Malmros 2006. Lately the subject was further broached by Ghosh 2011, chap 2, – however, see strong criticism by Bolton 2022, pp. 471–472 (n. 49).

1263 Jesch 2016, p. 175. See further *SkP* V and Ross 2022. Chap 3 specifically addresses the problem of authenticity.

1264 Ross 2016. The point is also elaborated on by Ghosh 2011, p. 59.

1265 To just scratch the surface from the twenty-five years before the publication of the current book: Fidjestøl 1999; Bagge 2000; Gunnell 2005, pp. 93–95; Kristjánsson and Ólason 2014, I, §3; Thorvaldsen 2016; Olsen 2016; 2020; Þorgeirsson 2017; Males 2022.

1266 Lönnroth 2016, pp. 13–14. Lönnroth's epitome that, 'In most cases, one should be content with reading them [Eddic poems] as timeless poetry', strikes a chord with my own humble opinion.

1267 Sapp 2022.

1268 Quotation after Ross 2005, p. 14.

For these reasons, and because even Sapp's datings cannot on their own always confirm that ON *þegn* in one or another verse was not a later, metrically permissible swap in course of oral transmission,[1269] at best, the Eddas dated his way *may* indicate one of the *termini post quos* for this or that poetic use of ON *þegn*. But since those are largely in line with the more securely dated skaldic poetry, the protracted debate about the origins of the Eddic poems is not paradigmatically important for this study.

4.2.1.2 prose textual format

The two Old Norse textual prose genre specimens which supposedly relate to the Viking Age are some of the sagas – first among them *Íslendingasögur* and *konunga sǫgur* – and legislation.

The saga corpus consists of ca. 140 items.[1270] The relevant question for this research is that of the long and vigorously discussed origins of sagas in the so-called book prose (GER. *Buchprosa*) and free prose (GER. *Freiprosa*). These terms were introduced in 1913 by the Swiss philologist Andreas Heusler (1865–1940)[1271] and, in brief, amount to the following recapitulation. The book-prose school of thought, informally founded by the German legal historian Konrad Maurer (1823–1902) in 1871 and subsequently promoted by many a distinguished Icelandic scholar, suggested that Old Norse–Icelandic sagas were from the start conscious written products of an educated elite. This approach, or rather, general attitude, was galvanised as a reaction to the previous (mis)understanding of sagas as orally-performed folk literature supposedly faithfully transmitted by oral media until eventual recording in the 13th century (free prose). In Norway, this was the opinion of, for example, Rudolf Keyser (1803–1864) and Peter A. Munch (1810–1863). This controversy was in immediate dialogue with the 19th-century *Zeitgeist*: the free prose with the earlier Romanticism, the book prose with the later Icelandic nationalism in the struggle for political independence from Denmark.[1272] It is neither the chapter's intention, nor a good place to recapitulate all arguments and every study in the two schools. Suffice it to say that from the 1960s, works by Theodore Andersson, Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij, Carol Clover, Gísli Sigurðsson, Tommy Danielsson, Hermann Pálsson – to name but a few authors among many other – have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of saga authorship in place of the antagonism between the book and free prose theories.[1273] Crucially for our interests, at present, scholars do not dismiss an oral tradition underlying written sagas.

1269 Which Sapp (2020, p. 23) himself acknowledges. Preben Sørensen argued in 1991 that the extant Eddic poetry has hardly been able to preserve its initial form during centuries of transmission; rather, Sørensen claimed, the oral tradition should be sought in the content and narrative structures of the recorded poems (Johansson 2010, p. 141).

1270 The number is estimated by Ross 2010, p. 36, and follows from her list at pp. 32–36.

1271 On him and his contributions to the Germanic studies, see Burrell 2023, pp. 74–89.

1272 This latter fact is expounded on by Byock 2001, pp. 152–156. See his other critique and estimation of specifically *Íslendingasögur* as a historical source in the same chapter, including his discussion of the Icelandic scholar Sigurður Nordal (1886–1974) and his 1957 programme article 'The Historical Element in the Icelandic Family Sagas'. Byock only tangentially mentions Nordal's contemporary, the Swedish historian Lauritz Weibull (1873–1960), who, contrarily, had half a century earlier effectively arrived at similar assessments of sagas in opposition to Swedish conservative historical nationalism. In Norway, Weibull's counterpart were Halvdan Koht (1873–1965) and Edvard Bull (1881–1932) (see Krag 1999, pp. 11–14). On the Weibull brothers, see Janson 1999, chaps 13–14. Empiricistic ideas, shared by Nordal, Koht, and the Weibulls, were not stand-alone rarities (Helle 2011, pp. 55–58 *et passim*; Bagge 2014, – *cf.* Myrvoll 2014; also above, n. 167). It is impossible to detach them from a wider Nordic historiographical context of the period in which new source-critical methods were rapidly developing in a constant dialogue (Myhre 2000, pp. 11–14; Torstendahl 2011; Larsson 2017, pp. 129–151).

1273 Sigurðsson 2005, pp. 285–292; Ross 2010, chap 3; Callow 2017, pp. 15–19; Phelpstead 2020, pp. 26–31.

A wholly different matter is how factually accurate and reliably-narrated this tradition is. Towards the end and at the turn of the last century, voices to support at least some (especially kings') sagas' reserved serviceability as sources for earlier periods were gaining momentum.[1274] For *Íslendingasögur*, it is today common to accept them as

> [...] what thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders believed about their island's past, and to leave somewhat to one side the question of the relation of this consistent picture to the realities of the period between 870 and 1030.[1275]

As with the *Poetic Edda*, in the course of oral transmission the language and elements of lexical-conceptual complexes could be involuntarily updated to meet the composers' and audience's *Erfahrungsraum*. For this reason, below, sagas will be treated with a benefit of trust in technical veracity, but foremost as medieval records that are *a priori* reflective of those who recorded sagas on parchment narrated their past in accordance with own *Erwartungshorizont*.[1276]

The oldest medieval Nordic legislation extant is represented by the so-called *Provincial Laws* (SW. *landskapslagar*, DAN. *landskabslove*, NORW. *landskapslover*). *Grágás*, a single law-code in two different redactions, is known from Iceland, but modern scholars believe it to have been a private collection. Later, the *Provincial Laws* were augmented or replaced by national royal legislation: in Norway, by *Landslov* ("Laws of the Land";[1277] NORW. *Magnus Lagabøtes landslov*) in 1274 AD by King Magnús Hákonarson (r. 1263–1280); in Sweden, by the similarly-named *Landslag* (SW. *Magnus Erikssons landslag*) in 1347 AD by King Magnús Eiríksson (r. 1319–1364); in Iceland, after subordination to the Norwegian king, first by *Járnsíða* ("Ironside") in 1271–1273 AD and then soon after by *Jónsbók* ("John's Book", so named after the law-speaker Jón Einarsson) in 1281 AD. In Denmark, no unified code was drafted, but, perhaps, *Jyske Lov* ("The Law of Jutland") was intended as such.[1278] In the Danish legislation, ON *þegn* (part in the ON compound *þegngildi*) occurs only once,[1279] and so Danish laws will be consequently put to the side.

1274 E.g., Andersen 1977; Sawyer 1998, pp. 10–11; Steinsland 2000, pp. 124–129; Williams 2001; Helle 2011, pp. 72–73; Bagge 2014; Tveito 2013; Melnikova 2017; Bolton 2022, pp. 467–468; Blundell 2024; Bagge 2002 (partially recycled in Bagge 2009), with references to important works by Claus Krag and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson. Bagge's approach, however, was ardently criticised by Sawyer 2003 and less vigorously by Myrvoll 2014, pp. 404–405. See also the discussion of saga source potential and approaches of varying opt- and pessimism by Boulhosa 2005, pp. 32–42; Orning 2008; Cormack 2006.

1275 Phelpstead 2020, p. 26. *Cf.* Niels Lund's categorical statement four decades prior that, "It appears at presently commonly accepted that Icelandic sagas do not belong here" (i.e. the Viking Age) (*At de islandske sagaer slet ikke hører hjemme i denne sammenhæng synes nu almindelig accepteret*; Lund and Hørby 1980, p. 30).

1276 See considerations on the applicability of *Íslendingasögur* for retrospective reconstructions of earlier (West) Norse society by Orning 2017. Additional arguments for and against the sagas' serviceability for social studies of the Viking Age derive from one's (dis)belief in (dis)continuity in Old Norse–Icelandic social order between c. 900 and c. 1200 AD (Helle 2011, pp. 74–76; Denis Sukhino-Khomenko 2020a, pp. 212–216).

1277 Also variously translated "National Law", "Code of the Realm", "National Code", "Landlaw", "Law of the Realm", etc.

1278 General English overviews of the Nordic laws include: Norseng 1991, pp. 138–140; Sandvik and Sigurðsson 2005; Tveit 2016, pp. 45–51. Swedish law-codes are separately covered by Ljungqvist 2022, pp. 27–35; Danish by Andersen 2014, pp. 11–16, and Hybel 2018, pp. 157–168. A fundamental source study into the Nordic laws was carried out by Strauch 2011. The ongoing *Medieval Nordic Laws* series, a part of the *Routledge Medieval Translations*, intends to publish modern English translations of all separate Nordic law-codes (at the time this book was in production, six volumes had seen light: the Danish laws, the *Guta Lag* ["The Law of the Gotlanders"], *Borgarþingslǫg* ["The Law of Borgarthing"] and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg*, the elder *Gulaþingslǫg*, *Västgötalagen*, and *Landslov*; each includes a thorough introduction into the sources and their context).

1279 *JysL*, Anden bog §13, pp. 162–163.

The oldest fragmentary manuscripts containing bits from *Provincial Laws* come from the late 12th century,[1280] and it is only after *c.* 1250 AD that complete texts become available. They, however, do not hesitate in claiming to reiterate a previous legal tradition, and so do other contemporaneous sources. Norwegian *Gulaþingslǫg* ("The Law of Gulathing"), for example, states that the provisions in the religious section (ON *kristinn réttr*) were promulgated by King Óláfr Haraldsson and contain new laws (ON *nýmæli*) by King Magnús Erlingsson (r. 1161–1184). Snorri Sturluson claims that King Magnús inn Góði had a law book written down, called *Grágás* (not to be confused with the Icelandic laws of the same name). All sources on King Hákon Goði, save Theodoric the Monk, ascribe legislative activity to this ruler, including instituting the Gulathing and Frostuthing. The Swedish elder *Västgötalagen* ("The Law of Vestrgautland") credits lawmen, pagan Lum(ber) and Christian Áskell Magnússon as well as others, with the knowledge of (older, one should think) rules. The Icelandic historian Ari inn Fróði (1067–1148) claimed that Úlfljótr, one of Iceland's first settlers, had brought and modelled the first Icelandic laws on *Gulaþingslǫg*. The same source dates the first written recording of Icelandic laws to 1117–1118 AD in *Hafliðaskrá* ("The Code of Hafliði"), and the mid-12th-century *First Grammatical Treatise* names laws as already circulating in writing in Iceland.

As with sagas, the question is thus how much this tradition shines through in the extant legal texts. Somewhat ironically, the same Konrad Maurer who stood at the forefront of the book-prose school in the question on saga origins, held laxer criteria for the Nordic laws. Maurer was a student of the then-popular German school of historical jurisprudence with its strong belief in the "(Ur-)Germanic law" (GER. *Urrecht*, *Germanenrecht*, *urgermanisches Recht*, etc.).[1281] He suggested that the first extant compilations were private collections rather than law-codes proper (GER. *Rechtsbücher* and *Gesetzbücher*, accordingly) but that they nevertheless preserved the laws of yore. The long acceptance of this doctrine was shattered by the criticism from the Swedish historian Elsa Sjöholm. Based on earlier research about continental influences in the Nordic laws, in 1977 and 1988 she rebuffed any tangible oral substance to the known texts and instead explained their existence as a result of the "colonisation" of Sweden (and ultimately of Scandinavia as a whole) by the Catholic Church in the 12th century. Once again, entering into the complexities of the heated polemics that unfolded will unnecessarily inflate this study.[1282] Currently, the moderate scholarly consensus is generally wary of concrete in-text assertions about the antiquity of the laws in question. "Old" in traditional cultures is often a hallmark and synonym of "good", and Fernanda Pirie, for example, points out that,

> [a]ppeal to the ancestral past to justify the application of a rule or principle is often a feature of non-literate societies.[1283]

At the same time, scholars acknowledge a complex sandwich structure in the earliest *Provincial Laws* and admit that the extant texts do to an extent reflect much older, even archaic, norms. Stefan Brink, for example, drew attention to a complex legal procedure

1280 *Gulaþingslǫg*: AM, MSS 315 e and f; *Grágás*: AM, MS 315 d fol.

1281 On its main tenets and history, see Dilcher 2016; Shoemaker 2018, pp. 249–263.

1282 Sjöholm, of course, was not the only critic of the German school of historical jurisprudence at the time – suffice it to mention, e.g., Birgitte Wåhlin and Per Nyström (1903–1993). An (not entirely impartial) overview of the discussion was published by Brink 2014b. See other chapters in the same volume, as well as Norseng 1991, *passim*; Tamm 2004; Brink 2018, pp. 185–188.

1283 Quotation after Brink 2018, p. 186; although *cf.* Kuskowski 2024.

of compensation for non-lethal injuries and rituals involved in land sales, both of which must predate the written *Väst-* and *Östgötalagen* ("The Law of Östergötland").[1284] Most endeavours in a similar vein rely on philological and linguistic methods that rarely yield absolute datings. Reference points, at least in form of *termini ante/post quos*, can be found in colligations with external material. For example, from comparison with the Kyivan *Primary Chronicle*, Elena Melnikova and Martina Stein-Wilkeshuis made a case that "swearing rings" (ON *eiðhringr*) and associated "ring oaths" (ON *baugeiðr*) must have entered legal practice by the 940s at the latest.[1285] Galina Glazyrina plausibly explained some episodes in *Haralds Saga Sigurðarsonar* ("The Saga of King Haraldr Sigurðarson") in *Heimskringla* as consequential of legal norms found in *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Frostuþingslǫg*.[1286] The appearance in Anglo-Saxon laws of Old Norse legal lexis known from the *Provincial Laws* and beyond, as well as unequivocal parallels suggest their (embryonic?) existence as early as the Anglo–Scandinavian co-assimilation in the "Danelaw".[1287]

In summary, *Provincial Laws* are unquestionably stratigraphical sources that indeed feature not only archaic linguistic features, which are themselves not diagnostic, but also should have preserved *some* archaic norms. Dating the latter, however, may be challenging and must be done on a case-by-case basis. To be safe, the governing principle in this book is Per Norseng and Sverre Bagge's agreement that the extant texts reflect the state of legal affairs at or shortly before (perhaps, within one generation) the recording,[1288] with a *potential* for earlier origins of this or that feature.

4.2.2 Practical Methodology and Technique

The initial raw data for this chapter was collected primarily from four corpora: ONP, Menota, IcePaHC, and *SkP*. These, however, do not account for Old East Norse texts. For compensatory purposes two compendia supplied additional references: Knut Frederik Söderwall's dictionary of medieval Swedish and the *Dictionary of the Old Danish Language* (DAN. *Gammeldansk Ordbog*) by the Danish Language and Litterature Society. The two turned out, however, to be of secondary importance, as both contained references only to post-1300 AD relevant sources and, by and large, their number is marginal. Since neither of the

1284 Brink 2011, pp. 147–156. *Cf.* Sanders 1991.

1285 Melnikova 2014 (with reference to Stein-Wilkeshuis's paper at p. 178 [n. 12]). On "oath rings", see Sundqvist 2016, chap 10.

1286 Glazyrina 1991. Again, there, of course, exists a danger that *Heimskringla* modernised its account to meet its readers' expectations. Further reference to stratigraphical studies in Nordic legislation are to be found in: Brink 2018, p. 187.

1287 Stattel 2019 (with a reference to the fundamental 1989 article by Charlotte Neff at p. 169 [n. 31]). An interesting and presently understudied, it would seem, early borrowing from legal Old Norse into Old English is OE *fēstermenn* (< ON *fastar*, lit. bondsman; Love et al. 2020, p. 86 [*s.v.* "fastar"]; in *Östgötalagen*, appears as *fæstamaþer*: Brink 2011, pp. 152–154) which occurs only in specifically Scandinavian contexts (in Northu 2:3, p. 380; in the York Gospel; and in S 1448a [971–992 AD] – though see Fenger 1972, pp. 88, 94, for reservations of how much lexical borrowings are indicative of legal influence *per se*). Most thought-provocative legal parallels on the two coasts of the North Sea have been found by Tveit 2016, pp. 294–297, 305–307. I myself have suggested that *Walreaf* is a very early stray phrase of some originally Old Norse law provision (Sukhino-Khomenko 2020b, pp. 211–213; see a further reference to a paper by Pilar Álvarez and Teodoro Antón on other possible parallels between some prescriptions of the *Gulaþingslǫg* and King Æthelstan's legislation at p. 212 [n. 23] in the last-cited item).

1288 Norseng 1991, p. 160; Bagge 2010, p. 226. *Cf.* Niels Lund's stronger opinion that while it goes beyond doubt that the Danish *Provincial Laws* contain earlier layers, they cannot be used to elucidate Viking-Age law (Lund and Hørby 1980, p. 32). The origins and dating problem are discussed specifically by Vogt 2010, chap 4.

four used Internet resources incorporate the whole Old Norse corpus, wherever possible indices in published editions were checked for sources reported by the four resources as containing ON *þegn*. Like DOEC, Menota is designed to search not for lemmas but for combinations of characters. This software architecture necessitated that all potential spellings for all grammatical forms and compounds had to be included. To this end, the spelling variations of ON *þegn* and elements in known compounds (*bú-*, *-skylda*, *-gildi*, etc.) listed in ONP were taken for a guide. Thereafter was developed a code to generate a list of all potential combinations in all recorded spelling forms (as well as many impossible forms) in the following formulae: 1) first compound element + lemma + inflectional suffix, 2) lemma + second compound element + inflectional suffix.[1289] This list was then used for queries in concordance with the search tool in the Menota corpus. Finally, for the Eddic corpus, the concordance by Robert Kellogg was used.[1290]

The end product of search across the four corpora returned 540 non-runic hits for ON *þegn*. Since the Old Norse corpus as a unified database did not exist at the time of this research, this figure must not be final. Thus, Scandinavian charters appeared only in the results in ONP, and chances are that the final number may be far larger. Revealingly, however, the results in all four corpora generally overlapped and coincided, so unless major layers of Old Norse remain unentered, perhaps, the final number would not qualitatively differ dramatically after all. Unlike the Old English corpus, the Old Norse assortment also included some (hardly all, of course) *variae lectiones* across manuscripts.

Because ON *þegn* occurred some four time less often than its counterpart in Old English, each and every one could receive more attention. Some liberties were allowed, however, when working with documents. After an initial familiarisation with the results, it became apparent that this source employs ON *þegn* exclusively formulaically: in legal amendments and royal letters, it repetitively figures in greetings, and in diplomas, it just as repetitively figures in the ON compound *þegngildi* or as a stand-in for the latter in the ON formula *þegn ok bœtr*. In both cases, the meaning and usage are the one and the same, and since most of the documents are post-1300 AD anyway, they will make only rare appearances below.

167 sources are still too great a number for any attempt to perform source-critical enquiry into each. With this magnitude of raw data, relevant information was consulted from printed editions used throughout the book. That being said, in terms of dating, sagas of all Old Norse texts pose many a vexing challenge:[1291] extant manuscripts are very often later than the agreed upon date of composition, some texts do not exist as self-standing finalised pieces but are integrated in other compositions and, in some cases, scholars can ascertain that a given extant version reworked earlier sources. For *Íslendingasögur*, support comes from the cumulative tables by Carl Phelpstead and Vésteinn Ólason.[1292] Datings suggested in the *Íslenzk Fornrit* series were generally preferred; these, however, on the whole tend to be older than in, for example, the *Complete Sagas of Icelanders* series, and so known polyphony of scholarly opinions was accounted for wherever possible. For datings and provenance

1289 The complete list was made publicly available with open-source license at: <https://github.com/mmehdig/thegn_extraction/blob/main/word_generation.py> (accessed 27 April 2023). The tool developed for automatically scrapping the query results was publicised online as Sukhino-Khomenko Ghanimifard 2021. My sincerest gratitude is to Mehdi Ghanimifard who proposed and developed this method.

1290 Kellogg 1988, p. 517 (*s.v.* "þegn").

1291 Some major studies in this area include but are not limited to: Sveinsson 1958; Mundal 2013; Callow 2017.

1292 Ólason 2005, pp. 114–115; Phelpstead 2020, pp. 169–174.

of hagiographical prose, the fundamental edition by Kirsten Wolf was consulted.[1293] For legal texts, the main reference book was the overview by Dieter Strauch supported by introductions to published volumes in the Routledge *Medieval Nordic Laws* series (above, n. 1278). All treatments of the skaldic material fully relied on the information supplied by the *SkP* volumes across the board.

4.3 Old Norse *Þegn*

§4.3 corresponds to the *first stage* in the methodology proposed in Chapter 1 (above, §1.7.1) and addresses research Question 1 as regards Scandinavia. Namely it will examine the first-hand sources to map the various observed meanings of ON *þegn*, with implications for the social sphere. It must be acknowledged straightaway that the problem of separating discrete lexical senses of ON *þegn* is even more pronounced than on the Old English material. This has partially to do with the wider than in Old English spread of various formulaic uses of the lexeme under study. A bigger challenge, upon consideration, discloses itself in the proportion of poetic texts in the raw data – a total of 112 occurrences (almost one fifth of the whole assortment) in 65 sources (nearly one third of all) – and it is notoriously difficult to assign many of them an unambiguous meaning exclusionary to others. When feasting with his nephew King Magnús at the invitation of one Áslákr, King Haraldr Sigurðarson taunted his nephew's half-brother, Þórir, by calling him *ógegn þegn* (lit. dishonest, wicked *thegn*) because of his father's name Hvinngestr (lit. a guest guilty of petty theft).[1294] Did Haraldr imply that Þórir was a person of ill-repute, a poor member of a retinue, or unreliable in battle? All three can match the prose and poetic framework of this stanza. Fortunately, this one instance can be collated against circulations of the notion of a "good *thegn*" elsewhere (below, §4.3.1.5) and thus assigned the first of the suggested semantics. But other, less easily contextualised or collatable fragments abound. With the reservation that modern scholars are not native speakers of Old Norse, this lexical situation approaches what some linguists have come to call agnonymy (< GR. ἀ-, lit. not, γνῶσις, lit. knowledge, and ὄνομα, lit. name). An agnonym is a known but little intelligible and opaque lexical or phraseological unit for a user of a given language.[1295] The agnonymic character of ON *þegn* often transpires when the word is left untranslated in modern editions and is only updated to more common spellings if they exist (thus, SW. *tägn*, NORW. *tegn*, MODE *thane*), perhaps on account of its poor translation potential, but just as much, maybe, due to semantic entanglement. Therefore, below shall be spotlighted first of all the most transparent specimens, and enumerations and nomenclature may be subject to revision in later research.

Overall, contextual meanings of ON *þegn* in literary sources break up into two major strands: self-sufficient meanings revolving around the concept and lexeme "man", "person", "individual", and meanings contextually and socially conditioned by a relation to kingship and royal power. On top of that, some rarer occasions do not conform to this general division and thus form a third group of miscellaneous senses. Each of these clusters will be addressed separately in corresponding sub-chapters below.

1293 Wolf 2013. See also a shorter overview by Wellendorf 2017.

1294 *Þegi þú, Þórir! Þegn est ógegn; heyrðak, at héti Hvinngestr faðir þinn* ('Be quiet, Þórir! You're an unreliable *thegn*; I heard that your father was called Hvinngestr ["Thief-guest"]'; Hharð Lv 3). For illustrative purposes, I allowed myself to change 'man' for "*thegn*" in the original translation.

1295 The term was coined and first introduced by Morkovkin and Morkovkina 1997 (see esp. p. 119).

4.3.1 ON Þegn *Unconditioned by Kingship*

4.3.1.1 (generic) man/person

Numerically not dominant but still widespread is ON *þegn*'s umbrella meaning "man" or "individual" where context does not allow to narrow it down. This meaning has been found at least 38 times across 30 elements of 27 sources. Both prose and poetic formats made it on this list, as well as all five textual types and five suggested genres.

Relevant poetic specimens take up a lion's share of this assemblage (31 hits in 23 sources). One source suggests that poetic use of ON *þegn* in this sense is rather unspecific. A mnemonic list (ON *þula*) called *Manna Heiti* ("Names for 'Men'") presents, as the name suggests, 133 acceptable poetic synonyms (ON *heiti*) for ON *maðr* (lit. man), one of which is ON *þegn*.[1296] Three late (14th–15th-century) skaldic stanzas substantiate this point. They use ON *maðr* to denote an actor in their first *helmingar* (half-stanzas) but ON *þegn* in the second ones, without any character change.[1297]

Further textual evidence suggests that on the lexical level it can sometimes assume full synonymity with ON *maðr* and not just in poetry as *Manna Heiti* indicates. Only nine Old Norse sources from the overall relevant selection translated/adapted Latin originals, but one of them offers further helpful evidence for the observed synonymity. The relatively early (before *c.* 1200×1225 AD, to judge from AM, MS 645 4° dated to this time span) *Páls Saga Postola I* ("Peter the Apostle's Saga I") recycled the *Historia Actuum Apostolorum* ("The History of the Deeds of the Apostles") attributed to Peter of Poitiers (d. *c.* 1215), itself based on the *Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament. Where the Vulgate reads *virum, cujus est zona haec* ("the man whose belt this is"; Acts 21:10), the saga translated *sá þegn er þenna gyrðil á* ("that *thegn* who owns this girdle").[1298] Of original native sources, OSW. *þæghnsbane* (lit. *thegn* killer) seems demonstrative. The compound is a *hapax legomenon* and occurs in *Västgötalagen*,[1299] but it goes beyond doubt that it is a mere duplet of a by far much more common ON *mannsbani* (lit. man killer, slayer). Perhaps synonymity such as this becomes most apparent in some *variae lectiones* across manuscripts of same texts. Where AM, MS 68 4° of *Eiðsvaþingslǫg* reads that a woman who failed an ordeal to prove innocence of infanticide and unlawfully returned to Norway is to pay the king half a *mannsgildi* (i.e. *wer-*

1296 Þul *Manna* 2.

1297 *Hallvarð píndu ýtar illir austr í Vík á litlu flaustri; fljóði vildi forða dauða f r æ g ð a r m a ð r, er vándir rægðu. Lýðir ofan af landi síðan ljótir þegar af boganum skjóta; þilju brá hann við þeiri pílu; þ e g n i n n flýgur örin í gegnum* ('Wicked men tormented Hallvarðr east in Viken on a little ship; the famous m a n wanted to save a woman, whom evil people maligned, from death. Then wicked people immediately shoot with a bow down from the land; he held the thwart against that arrow; the arrow flies through the *t h e g n*; Anon *Heil* 22); *Siða geymdi sjá m a ð r sjaldan um barnsaldr; uppi vill hann heims hopp hafa, þegar til gaf. Þ e g n i n n lagði þrátt magn þykkjustórr í víndrykk; gjörðiz hann við gleðiorð gálauss um sitt mál* ('This m a n seldom heeded morals during childhood; he wants to uphold the pleasures of the world as soon as there was an opportunity. This insolent *t h e g n* incessantly put his energy into wine-drinking; he became careless about his condition among jesting words'; Anon *Mv III* 3); *Brimgl óða fór bæði bríkog m a ð r i n n ríki í musterið mesta; mannfjöldi kom hölda. Brúðr af treganum tjáði tilkall við hal snjallan; þrætir þegar á móti þ e g n af öllu megni.* ('Both the plank of ocean-embers [GOLD > WOMAN] and the powerful m a n went into the very great church; a large crowd of men came. The woman brought charges against the clever fellow sorrowfully [lit. with sorrow]; the *t h e g n* immediately contests them with all his might'; Anon *Vitn* 15; my emphasis). For illustrative purposes, original authorial variants that rendered ON *þegn* were sidestepped in favour of a transliteration.

1298 *PálSgPost I*, chap 12, p. 226.

1299 *ÝVgL*, Mandråpsbalken §9, p. 125. On account of verbal repetition of this clause by the younger redaction, the corrupt *þés bani* from the older one ought to be interpreted as a ditto.

gild, lit. man price, potentially a *hapax legomenon*), NB, MS 317 4° substitutes it with *þegngildi* (lit. *thegn* price).[1300] A similar swap can be found in *Gísls Þáttr Illugasonar* ("Gisl Illugason's Tale"). Where two manuscripts read that the protagonist, Jón Ǫgmundarson (1052–1121), reminded the Norwegian king that 'we Icelanders are just as much' *yðrir menn* (lit. your men) as the Norwegians and ought not be prosecuted any differently, manuscripts AM 219 fol. and 392 4°, Stockh. papp. 4° nr 4 read *yðrir þegnar* (lit. your *thegns*).[1301]

At least three further poetic sources demonstrate that ON *þegn* can apply to a (male) living being even of a non-human order. In *Haustlǫng*, the god Óðinn commands the god Loki to distribute ox meat among Óðinn himself and his fellow-travellers, Loki and the god Hœnir, here collectively called ON *þegnar*.[1302] The giant (ON *jǫtunn*) Hallmundr Bergbúinn (lit. mountain-dweller) in the eponymous *Hallmundarkviða* ("Hallmundr's Poem") metaphorically describes, among other natural phenomena, what matches an earthquake and ascribes it to lumber-work by himself and other giants, again referred to as *thegns*.[1303] The legendary hero Ǫrvar-Oddr styles his child Vignir born of Hildr, daughter of a giant, a son "unlike other *thegns*".[1304]

Most occurrences of ON *þegn* allow a narrower contextualisation of this rather unspecific sense, to which the analysis now may proceed.

4.3.1.2 (generic) populace; politically entitled populace: the *bœndr*[1305]

Excluding compounds, 8 skaldic stanzas and 3 prose texts use ON plur. *þegnar* in the sense best lemmatised as "people of a province/country".

Around 1038 AD, the poet Sigvatr Þórðarson acted as a spokesman on the Norwegians' behalf whom King Magnús inn Góði had been treating heavy-handedly on account of their previous armed resistance to his royal father. On this occasion, Sigvatr composed and recited the *Bersǫglisvísur* ("Plain-Speaking *Vísur*") in which he pointed out to the king the unwanted needlessness of terrorising the people:

> I followed your father well, that generous lord, who wanted my company; now thegns are pleased with the peace. [...] Who urges you, battle-promoter [WARRIOR], to slay the

1300 *En ef hon kømar j land aptr ok uill i lande uera þa skall hon giællda III mærkr biskupi en kononge þægngilldi ok æitir þatt hæiðins morðz giolld* ('And if she returns to the land, and wishes to remain in the land, then she shall pay three marks to the bishop, and half a *mannsgildi* [NB, MS 317 4° reads *þægngiúldi*] to the king, and that is called "heathen *mannsgjǫld*"'; *EidL* §3:4, p. 4).

1301 *En hugsið um þat, góðr herra, at svá erum vér íslenzkir menn yðrir þegnar sem þeir er hér eru innan lands* (*Gísls Þáttr*, p. 323; *varia lectio* after Foote 2003, p. 66).

1302 *Fljótt bað foldar dróttinn Fárbauta mǫg Várar þekkiligr með þegnum þrymseilar hval deila* ('The gracious lord of the earth [= Óðinn] bade the son of Fárbauti <giant> [= Loki] share out quickly the whale of the Vár <goddess> of the bowstring [= Skaði > OX] among the fellows'; Þjóð *Haustl* 5).

1303 *Springa bjǫrg ok bungur bergs* (*vinnask þá*) *stinnar stór, ok hǫrga hrœrisk hjarlborg* (*firar margi*). *Þytrs of Þundar glitni, — þrammak á fyr skǫmmu — en fagna þys þegnar þeir hvívetna fleiri, þeir hvívetna fleiri* ('Great cliffs and strong ridges of rock burst, and the battle-stronghold of cairns [MOUNTAIN] shakes; many men the perish. There is roaring around the hall of Þund <river> [MOUNTAIN] – I have been lumbering upon it recently – and more of those fellows increase the tumult by every means, more of those by every means'; Hallm *Hallkv* 4).

1304 *Þýddumz ek hjá Hildi, hoska ok stóra, raunsjáliga rísa dóttur, ok við henni heldr sterkligan útran son eiga gerðak, ok ólíkan öðrum þegnum* ('I had a relationship with Hildr, the wise and large one, the stately daughter of the giant, and I had with her a very strong, glorious son, who was [lit. and] unlike other *thegns*'; ǪrvOdd *Ævdr* 60). Margaret Clunies Ross, the editor of Ǫrvar-Oddr's *Ævidrápa* ("Life-*Drápa*") in *SkP* VIII, comments that a motif of sexual relationship between a hero and friendly divine figures (giants) can be found in other *fornaldarsögur*.

1305 For illustrative purposes, I allowed myself to alter *SkP*'s translations and keep "*thegns*" in the stanzas quoted throughout this section.

> livestock of *thegns*? It is insolence for a prince to do that in his own land. No one had earlier advised a young ruler in such a way; I think your troops are tired of plunder; people are angry, king.[1306]

Some 120 years after King Óláfr's demise, the poet Einarr Skúlason (*c.* 1100 – after 1159) mentioned of Óláfr that the king 'concealed sublime goodness from able' *thegns* (*leyndi hóleitri gœzku snara þegna*), probably implying the Norwegians as a whole.[1307] Sigvatr's exhortations to show lenience were not without good reason. His younger contemporary, the skald Þjóðólfr Arnórsson (*c.* 1010 – *c.* 1066), later extolled his patron's, King Haraldr Sigurðarson's, violent retribution against the people of Raumaríki (present-day Romerike, Southern Norway) in Upplǫnd. Haraldr's retaliation was caused by their previous loyalty to Hákon Ívarsson (d. 1062) supposedly descendant from the Hlaðir jarls. In Þjóðólfr's words,

> [t]he assets of bold *thegns* burned up; embers were lodged in the thatch; the shaker of war-leaders [RULER] struck the Heinir [= inhabitants of Hedemarken] with a dire stone. The people begged for their lives; fire pronounced on the Hringar an enforced verdict, before the cessation of the destruction of Hálfr <legendary king> [FIRE] took place.[1308]

Four decades later Markús Skeggjason (*c.* 1040–1107) shared the same sentiment and vocabulary when praising King Eiríkr Sveinsson's (r. 1095–1103) expedition against the Baltic Slavs and victory over Emperor Henry IV's puppet chieftains. The king is said to have 'punish[ed] *thegns* for wrong behaviour' (*hegna þegnum ósið*), killing 'an untold number' of them (*drap ótal þegna*).[1309] The last time a skald celebrated such punitive policy is by the Icelandic politician and chieftain Sturla Þórðarson (1214–1284) about King Hákon Hákonarson's (r. 1204–1264) campaign in Vermaland in 1225 AD and suppression of armed opposition in Sulvik:

> [f]ire played on fire against the sky; the flame leaped into the collapsed hall; I believe those *thegns* thought {the harm of the forest} [FIRE] was surging far and wide. All people feared the wrath of the king; {the reliable ring-giver} [GENEROUS MAN] reddened the sharpened sword in Värmland.[1310]

Granted, in literary sources *thegns* as inhabitants of a given area do not always get prosecuted by kings. When the Norwegian King Óláfr inn Kyrri (r. 1067–1093) and Danish King Sveinn Ástríðarson (r. 1047–1076) entered a peace treaty in *c.* 1070 AD, the former's skald Steinn Herdísarson (*c.* 1035–1090) noted that, '[m]en [*þjóð*] like it, that [Óláfr] forces *thegns* to peace-talks'.[1311] Steinn almost certainly implied the Danes and Norwegians, because his

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1306 *Fylgðak þeim, es fylgju, fémildum gram, vildi, — nú eru þegnar frið fegnir — feðr þínum vel, mína.* […] *Hverr eggjar þik hǫggva, hjaldrgegnir, bú þegna? Ofrausn es þat jǫfri innanlands at vinna. Engr hafði svá ungum áðr bragningi ráðit; rán hykk rekkum þínum — reiðrs herr, konungr — leiðask* (Sigv *Berv* 3 and 11).

1307 Esk *Geisl* 13.

1308 *Gagn brann greypra þegna; glóð varð fǫst í tróði; laust hertoga hristir Heina illum steini. Lífs bǫ ðu sér lýðir; logi þingaði Hringum nauðgan dóm, áðr næmisk niðrfall Hǫolfs galla* (ÞjóðA *Sex* 22).

1309 Mark *Eirdr* 6 and 18. On the early Baltic exploits by Danish kings, see Hybel 2018, pp. 330–331.

1310 *Eim lék hyrr með himni; hljóp eldr í sal feldan vítt hykk þegnum þóttu þeim markar böl sveima. Óðuz allar þjóðir* (*eiðvandr*) *konungs reiði* (*baugsendir rauð brýndan brand í Vermalandi*) (Sturl *Hákfl* 4). On Sturla, his life and works, see Sigurðsson and Jakobsson 2017. Ǫrvar-Oddr used ON *þegnar* in a similar sense of the Bjarmar people (*Létum þegna, áðr þaðan færim, ófa marga öndu týna* [We caused exceedingly many *thegns* to lose their lives before we went from there]; ǪrvOdd *Ævdr* 12), but since it exists only in a legendary saga (*fornaldarsaga*) and describes legendary times, it cannot be chronologically anchored. Oppression by kings against country-folk in skaldic poetry was studied by Morris 1998, pp. 143–153.

1311 *Þjóð hugnar, þats* {*þrályndr ægir Engla*} *kúgar þegna til friðmála* (Steinn *Óldr* 12).

"colleague" Halli Stirði (mid-11th century) envisaged an analogous occasion: when Kings Sveinn Ástríðarson and Haraldr Sigurðarson entered into similar peace talks, they met obstruction by *thegns* on both sides who complained about previously incurred losses in course of mutual plundering.[1312]

Worth emphasising is the synonymity between ON plur. *þegnar* and *lýðir* in Þjóðólfr's poem and *þjóð*(*ir*) in Sturla's, and, perhaps, Steinn's. Both mean "men, people, folk, nation". Snorri Sturlason in the *Prose Edda*, a manual in skaldic art drafted sometime between 1221 and 1240 AD, defined ON *lýðr* (and its older form, *ljóðr*; *cf.* obsolete MODE *lede*) as "people of a country" (ON *landsfolk*),[1313] and the scribe of AM, MS 45 fol. in their copy of *Hákonar Saga Hákonarsonar* ("The Saga of King Hákon Hákonarson") saw it possible to swap ON *landsfolk* of all other manuscripts for ON *þegnar sínir* (lit. his [= the king's] *thegns*).[1314] By extension ON *lýðr* must be conditioning the meaning of ON *þegn*(*ar*) in the cited instances. The synonymity between ON *þjóð*(*ir*) and *þegnar* is further hinted at in a variant reading in the aforementioned *Prose Edda*: where other manuscripts read that ON *þjóð* is used of groups of thirty people, AM, MS 242 fol. (*Codex Wormianus*) replaces this lexeme with ON *þegnar*.[1315]

Prose texts nuance this usage by tapering the sense "populace" to only cover those of its members whose voice makes itself heard in political affairs. Such restriction manifests itself best in the problematic record of the treaty between the Icelanders and King Hákon Hákonarson, *Gizurárváttmáli* ("Gizurr's Covenant"), when the island lost its sovereignty to the Norwegian Crown in 1262 AD. The first clause reads unequivocally:

> This was consented and agreed by acclamation by all the people of Iceland. We offer to the honourable Lord King Hákon the Crowned, our service under that legal provision agreed by the kingdom and the thegns who inhabit the country [= Iceland].[1316]

Patricia Boulhosa's scrupulous analysis of this and associated documents demonstrates that *Gizurárváttmáli* must be far younger and was a probable retrospective reconstruction of the history of the Norwegian–Icelandic relationships, performed in the 15th century.[1317] However, textual critics appear unanimous that in this formulation, the clause could not have existed before 1302 AD.

The two remaining prose texts in the current section nevertheless suggest that whenever *Gizurárváttmáli* and its first clause in their extant form originated, its usage of ON *þegnar* was not anachronistic for the mid-13th century. The synoptic *Morkinskinna* (1217×1222 AD) and the slightly later *Fagrskinna* (dated between the *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*, thus approximately *c.* 1222 × *c.* 1235 AD) after it, credit King Magnús inn Góði's enthronement in Norway to

1312 *Telja hátt, es hittask, hvartveggja mjǫk, seggir, orð, þaus angra fyrða allmjǫk, búendr snjallir. Láta þeir, es þræta, þegnar, allt í gegnum, — svellr ofrhugi jǫ frum — eigi brátt við sǫttum* ('The brave farmers of both parties, when the men meet, speak very loudly words that offend people very greatly. Those *thegns* who wrangle the whole way through accede not at all quickly to terms of settlement; rashness builds up in the kings'; Halli XI *Fl* 4).

1313 *Skaldskaparmál* 65, p. 106 (l. 21).

1314 *HákHák*, II, chap 349, p. 190. Permissible lexical synonymity between ON *þegnar* and *landsfolk* also follows from the late 14th – early 15th-century indigenous Icelandic chivalric *Ála Flekks Saga* ("The Saga of Áli Flekkr"): *Hann var mildr af fé við sína þegna, ok því var hann mjǫk ástúðigr ǫllu landsfólkinu* ('He was generous with his wealth toward his *thegns*, and because of this, he was greatly beloved by all his countrymen'; Ála Saga, chap 19, p. 42), – I allowed myself to change the original translator's 'liegemen' for "*thegns*".

1315 Jónsson 1931, p. 188 (*variae lectiones* in the footnotes).

1316 *Var þetta iatad ok samþykt af ollum almuga á Islande med lofa take. Vier biodum uirduligum herra Hakone konunge hinum koronada uora þionustu undir þa grein Laganna sem samþykt er mille konung domsins ok þegnanna er landit bygia* (*Gizurárváttmáli*, p. 460). Translation after: Boulhosa 2005, p. 115.

1317 Boulhosa 2005, chap 3.

his acceptance by "all *thegns*, both rich and poor".[1318] *Fagrskinna* complicates its narrative by adding *ok alls múgsins* ('and of all the common people') to this list.[1319]

Save the quoted passage from *Gizurársáttmáli*, ON *múgr* (lit. mass, crowd) does not make registered appearance in conjunction with ON *þegn*. But a close social synonym, ON *alþýða* (lit. all people), does. The contemporaneous *Hákonar Saga Góða* ("The Saga of King Hákon Goði") in *Heimskringla* makes a clear separation between *alþýða* and the *bændr* and treats ON (*bú*)*þegn* as the latter's alliterative synonym in a fixed formula. In his plea to the people of Þrœndalǫg to convert to Christianity, King Hákon addresses

> [...] the farmers [*bændr*] and farm-thegns [*búþegnar*], rich and poor, together with all ordinary people [*alþýða*], young and old, wealthy and not well off, women as well as men...[1320]

From the later narrative in the next chapter follows that in this instance, the '*bændr* and *búþegnar*, rich and poor' clearly applied to an upper social category: Hákon's initiative agitated the Þrœndir and it was 'the desire and determination of the' *hǫfðingjar*[1321] together with all the *folk* that Hákon should sacrifice to traditional gods.[1322] Similarly, half a century later, the Norwegian *Landslov* and Icelandic *Járnsíða* after it opposed *bœndr* to *alþýða* in a general reminder of their obligations to the Norwegian king.[1323] *Óláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka* ("The Separate Saga of St Óláfr") on an occasion similar to the one in *Hákonar Saga Góða* prefers political vocabulary to the social. In its words, King Óláfr Haraldsson sent with Þórarinn Nefjólfsson greetings to

> [...] all the leading men and rulers of the country [= Iceland] and as well to all the population [*alþýða*] of men and women, young and old, rich and poor...[1324]

So too does *Silvesters Saga* ("The Saga of Bishop Sylvester") when it speaks of *stórmenn ok alþýða* (lit. magnates and common people) among the Jews and Christians for whom the

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1318 *En í ǫðrum stað leggr Magnús konungr allan Nóreg undir sik, svá vítt sem faðir hans hafði haft, ok fekk allt land orrostulaust ok með vild ok vilja allra þegna, bæði ríkra ok fátækra. Vildu allir heldr vera frjálsir undir Magnúsi konungi en þola lengr danskra manna yfirgang…* ('Back in Norway King Magnús established his rule as far as his father's power had extended, and he subdued the land without a battle and with the consent and agreement of all the *thegns*, rich and poor. They all desired rather to be free under King Magnús than to suffer the tyranny of the Danes any longer...'; *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 3, pp. 23–25).

1319 *Magnús konungr lagði undir sik allan Nóreg svá vítt sem faðir hans hafði átt, fekk landit orrostulaust ok at vild allra þegna, bæði ríkra ok óríkra, ok alls múgsins, ok vildu þá vera allir heldr frjálsir en þola lengr yfirgang Dana* ('King Magnús took power as widely over all of Norway as his father had done, gained the land without battle and with the consent of all the *thegns*, both powerful and otherwise, and of all the common people, and they all preferred rather to be free than to suffer the oppression of the Danes any longer'; *Fagrskinna*, chap 47, p. 210).

1320 *…bœndr ok búþegna, ríka ok óríka, ok þar með við alla alþýðu, unga menn ok gamla, sælan ok ósælan, konur sem karla* (*HáGóHkr*, chap 15, p. 169). The passage gets recycled almost verbatim (save the minor swap of ON *ósæll* for *fátœkr*, with the same meaning) in the much later (after 1300 AD) *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta* ("The Greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggsvason"), chap 22 (the version of AM, MS 61 fol. was consulted).

1321 Sigurðsson 2011, p. 80, thus defines ON *hǫfðingi*: '...the term that was used most frequently to describe the Icelandic chieftains and the earls of Orkney. This term was, however, also used to portray all kinds of different leaders, such as leaders of groups of slaves, kings and God' (*cf.* a similar definition by Poulsen, Vogt, and Sigurðsson 2019, p. 2).

1322 *…er þetta, konungr, sem sjálfir þér meguð heyra, vili ok ákafi hǫfðingja ok þar með alls fólks* (*HáGóHkr*, chap 16, p. 171). Note the apparent repetition of the same syntactical construction "the elite and therewith all general populace" with only minor lexical variation: *bœndr ok búþegna, ríka ok óríka, ok þar með við alla alþýðu* in chap 15 and *hǫfðingja ok þar með alls fólks* in chap 16.

1323 *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §12, I, p. 204 (reproduced in *JS* §13, p. 264).

1324 *…ollom hofðingiom oc lanzstiornar monnom, oc þar með allri alðyðv karla oc kvenna ungum manne sem gaumlvm sęlom oc veslom* (*ÓlHlSer*, chap 114, pp. 326–327 [ll. 16–2]).

reigning couple appointed two judges as legal mediators.[1325] And so also does *Landslov* when it declares that King Magnús Hákonarson's law amendments have been ratified by all the country's *beztir menn* (lit. best people) and on an entreaty of *alþýða*.[1326] Notably, in the first *helmingr* by Halli Stirði quoted above, the poet calls *bændr* the *thegns* who suffered from mutual Dano–Norwegian raiding and objected to the kings' reconciliation.

With the mention of *bændr*, it is at this point appropriate to quote Snorri Sturluson once again. In his *Prose Edda*, he put a list of *heiti* that shares many items with the *Manna Heiti* and provided the nearest thing to a native definition of who a Scandinavian *thegn* was:

> [...] thanes and *holdar*, this is what landowners [*búendr*] are called.[1327]

ON *hǫldr* and the social category it covered will be addressed below in §4.4.2.3. *Bændr*'s exact place in the early medieval Scandinavian structures was susceptible to variation, owing not only to a wide semantic range, but also to differing social conditions in which the *bændr* found themselves. However one chooses to socially position the *bændr*, two complimentary statements will probably spark few polemics. Namely, that writers of Old Norse could evidently conceptualise the *bændr* as the elite 'backbone society, *not numerically but in terms of their role in public life*',[1328] and that an according semantics imbued this lexeme. *Västgötalagen*, for example, insists that only the *bændr* may hold the offices of the lawman and bishop.[1329] That even without further contextual or adjectival qualifications (e.g., ON compound *stórbóndi*, lit. great *bóndi*) ON *bóndi* can on its own denote people of high status may be argued from Snorri's explanation that *drengir* are called those who serve "rich/powerful people or *bændr*",[1330] as well as from common formulaic opposition to the "common people". As with the Old English S 985 and Latin *Quadripartitus* (above, pp. 134–135), depending on the context and authorial style the ON formula *allir bændr/þegnar*, *ríkir ok óríkir* could be interpreted as syntactically either augmentative, or additive. A case in point is King Hákon inn Góði's address (above, n. 1320) to the powerful and not *bændr* and *búþegnar* who stand above the *alþýða* of agricultural labourers (ON *verkalýðr*) and *thralls* and extract profits from their work (ON *vinna*). The *bændr* and *búþegnar* – or the *hǫfðingjar*, as becomes clear just a few paragraphs below – object to work-free Christian Sundays because of loss of profit, whereas for the *alþýða* idle Sundays mean physical starvation, and so they also cause rejection. This episode is neatly mirrored in *Heimskringla* that describes the Norwegians suffering from the Danish oppression as *alt fólk, bæði ríka menn ok úríka ok alþýðu*

1325 *Silvesters Saga*, chap 13, pp. 258–259.

1326 *…með raðe oc samþyct hína beztu manna* [*j landeno ok bøna stað alþyðu* (*LL*, Mannhelgebolken §12, I, p. 352).

1327 *Þegnar ok hǫldar* (*ok hǫlða*), *svá eru búendr kallaðir* (*Skáldskaparmál* 65, p. 106 [ll. 6–7]).

1328 Gelting 2011, p. 161 (my emphasis).

1329 *ÄVgL*, Rättlösabalken §§2–3, p. 86; *YVgL*, Rättlösabalken §§2–3, p. 153. See also Lindkvist 2009. Because *Västgötalagen* is suspect of a Norwegian inspiration, and Norwegian connexions are known for their potential creator, the lawman Áskell Magnússon (Lindkvist 2013, pp. 58–60; 2014, pp. 93–94, – see one such telling parallel below, n. 1363), an inviting idea to entertain is whether these stipulations could have a bearing on Old Norse–Icelandic communities, as well.

1330 *Drengir heita ungir menn búlausir meðan þeir afla sér fjár eða orðstír, þeir fardrengir er milli landa fara, þeir konungs drengir er hǫfðingjum þjóna, þeir ok drengir er þjóna ríkum mǫnnum eða bændum* ('Young men that have not settled down, while they are making their fortunes or reputation, are called *drengir*; they are called *far-drengir* who travel from land to land, king's *drengir* who are in the service of rulers, and they are also called *drengir* who are in the service of rich men or landowners'; *Skáldskaparmál* 65, p. 106 [ll. 2–5]). That "rich/powerful men" and *bændr* are synonyms depends, of course, on the conjunctional syntactical function of ON *eða* (lit. or) in this sentence – should one prefer interpreting it as dysjunctional, the two would instead oppose each other.

('all the people, both high and low and all the whole population').[1331] Consider, on the other hand, Oddr the Monk's *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*. Where in chap 47 of the AM, MS 310 4° redaction has *bæði fátækum mǫnnum ok búǫndum* (lit. both the poor people and *bændr*), chap 38 in the later Stockh. perg. 4° nr. 18 redaction in the same place instead reads *ríkra ok óríkra* (lit. rich and poor, or: powerful and not).[1332] All told, ON *bændr* does demonstrate a conceptual potential to laconically encapsulate a broad social category, composed of "the powerful and not" (ON *ríkir ok óríkir*) who maintain a higher social status at the expense of actual physical toil by "the poor" (ON *fátækir*) and "broad mass" (ON *alþýða*). In agreement with Sverre Bagge's practical criterion (above, p. 30), this quality approaches them to a social elite, which also agrees with Bjørn Poulsen's reminder that, leastwise in the Viking Age, ON *bændr* did include those high strata that would later become manifestly separate (above, p. 19).[1333] This is probably why some authors did feel the need to adjectivally distingush them by adding ON *stór*, *ríkir* and similar – and, arguably, they were the same people as the *hǫldar*, whom Snorri explained as the *bændr* 'who have full status as regards their lineage and all their legal rights'.[1334] At any rate, in social terms then, the Viking-Age *bændr* are perhaps best summarised as a social category of heads of self-sufficient farmsteads and whose constituent and common socially relevant properties included personal freedom, economic self-support likely achieved by exploitation of dependent labour, entitlement to legal protection and bearing arms.

Judith Jesch's words that, '*búendr* [were] a class wider than one that could accurately be described as "elite"',[1335] however, hold particularly relevant in context of a Moscian elite ("ruling" or "political class"). The *bændr–thegns*' political representation must not seduce one to automatically equate them all across the board with the narrow top of the Scandinavian political decision-makers. The same *Morkinskinna* in an address by King Ingi (r. 1136–1161) from the Vík to his brother in Þrándheimr (present-day Trondheim), not unlike the ones brought out above, still opposes the *bændr* and *búþegnar* to *alþýða*. But it puts all three rather low on the list of addressees. Instead, it assignes primacy to co-King Sigurðr Munnr (r. 1136–1155) and three of his named counsellors as well as all his *lendir menn*,[1336] *hirðmenn* (i.e. retainers, members of his *hirð*), and housecarls (a sub-group of military retainers, later removed from the royal *hirð* under King Magnús Hákonarson),[1337] – by definition a group

1331 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 247, p. 411.

1332 *ÓlTrOdMunk*, p. 254.

1333 *Cf.* below, nn. 1683, 1684.

1334 *Þat eru búendr þeir er gildir eru *at ættum ok réttum fullum* (*Skáldskaparmál* 53, p. 80 [ll. 8–11]).

1335 Jesch 2015, p. 98.

1336 ON *lendr maðr* (lit. landed man) is an elastic social term (first mentioned in skaldic poetry during King Óláfr Haraldsson's reign) that resists a one-and-only universal definition. Iversen 2019, p. 63, likened medieval *lendir menn* to contemporaneous English barons by seeing in them people of prominent families vested with royal authority and charged with military leadership (see also his Iversern 2008, pp. 27–30). Opsahl 2011, p. 190, on the other hand, does not fail to mention that *lendir menn* should be seen as king's supporters but not exactly his agents or officials and emphasises reciprocity on a par with subordination. Both strands got aptly captured in *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 46, p. 58, further discussed by Andersen 1977, pp. 279–284. With the introduction of *sýslumenn* in Norway, from the second half of the 12th century 'the office of *lendr maðr* was stripped of its administrative duties and became more of an honorific title' (Orning and Poulsen 2019, p. 226). Eventually, King Magnús Hákonarson abolished the title in 1277 AD.

1337 *Þat var á ritinu at Ingi konungr sendir kveðju Sigurði bræðr sínum ok hans ráðuneyti,* [*Sáða-Gyrði, Ǫgmundi sviptí*], *Óttari birtingi, ok ǫllum lendum mǫnnum hans ok svá hirðmǫnnum ok húskǫrlum, vinum okkrum, búǫndum ok búþegnum ok allri alþýðu, sælum ok veslum, ungum ok gǫmlum, Guðs ok sína* ('The letter was to the effect that: King Ingi sends his brother Sigurðr and his counselors, Sáða-Gyrðr, Ǫgmundr sviptir, Óttarr birtingr, and all his district chieftains as well as his retainers and housecarls, our friends, the farmers and farm-*thegns* and all the people, rich and poor, young

more exclusive than the *bændr*. *Landslov* and *Járnsíða* profess the monarchocentric doctrine that in His care for the daily needs of "innumerable people and general populace" (*ótalligr lýðr ok ýmiss fjǫlmenni*), God appointed kings and bishops to govern them.[1338] In *Konungs Skuggsjá* ("The King's Mirror", *c.* 1250 AD), the *bændr* similarly oppose the "crowd" (ON *fjǫlmenni*)[1339] and together with *búþegnar* stand against "all other common folk" (ON *ǫnnur alþýða*). But they are also clearly separated from and ranked below 'kings and other princes and of the men who follow and serve them', *lendir menn*, and king's 'other lords and knights [...] and all the warriors who assist him in the government'.[1340] A very reminiscent picture is drawn in the mythological explanation of the Scandinavian social order (below, p. 246). The author of *Nikulás Saga Erkibiskups II* ("The II Saga of Archbishop Nicholas",[1341] *c.* 1370 AD) beseeches the saint to pray that God guide the king to good judgement for the sake of all his *thegns*, both rich and poor (*allra sína þegna ríkra sem fátækra*) (on the sense "subject", implied in this passage, see below).[1342] On a different occasion *Óláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka* mentions how the *alþýða* made up of both *thegns* and the unfree (more details below, §4.3.1.3) gathered in Þrándheimr in their military opposition to the king and on the call of the *lendir menn* and *bændr*.[1343] The already cited passages in *Landslov* and *Járnsíða* do oppose the *bændr* to *alþýða* but vest them both with the same dues to the king, their ON *þegnskylda* (lit. *thegn*'s obligation; on it, below). Crucially and in agreement with Michael Gelting's evaluation of the *bændr*'s leading societal role (above, n. 1328), whatever the preferred term for the elite of the free, these *bændr* (*ok búþegnar*)/*hǫfðingjar* (*ok landsstjórnarmenn*)/*stór-* or *ríkir*/*bestir menn* obviously socio-politically represent the broader mass of (*ǫnnur*) *alþýða*/*folk*/*fjǫlmenni*/*fátækir*/*óríkir* (*menn*). This becomes evident in cases of textual variation. Where one author may single the *bændr* (*ok búþegnar*) out (especially when including the king's immediate vassals), others will include them into the "common populace",[1344] an impression strengthened by *Konungs Skuggsjá*'s use of ON *ǫnnur*. Even more this mediatory quality can be perceived in the language of *Ágrip*: in three sequential chapters, thanks to his popularity with the *lýðr*, King Sigurðr Jórsalafari (r. 1103–1130) first has everyone syntactically impersonally take an oath of allegiance for his son, but shortly after the king's death the *hirð*, *hǫfðingjar*, and *alþýða* become divided between his heirs.[1345]

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and old, God's greeting and his own'; *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 91, p. 199 [found in GKS, MS 1009 fol.]). The letter was latest dissected by Wellendorf 2019. The long and short of his discussion is that, while the authenticity of the 1139 AD letter cannot be (dis)proved, it at any rate reflects the praxis (hence, also the language) of the 1160s at the latest.

1338 *LL*, Kristendomsbolken, §2, I, p. 169 (recycled in *ÞS*, §8, p. 262).

1339 Entries in ONP suggest that ON *fjǫlmenni* hardly was a technical term, but rather just a generic shorthand for "a multitude (of people)". Some entered examples, however, do suggest that *bændr*/*folk* can be set aside it.

1340 [*P*]*ar næst tok eg at foruitnast og at spyria wm kongliga sidu edur annara hofdingia þeira er þeim fylgia og þiona. Og eigi liet eg ospurt med ollu. vm lendra manna iþrott og þeira sidu. Enn þo lauk eg minne spurningu med þui at ræda wm þrottir bænda og fiolmennis þess er land byggrir og þeira sidu og athæfi… Sva ahann oc at minnaz ibæn sinni annarra landzhofðingia eða riddara oc allra annarra hærmanna sinna þeira sæm hanum veita fullting til rikis stiornar. Sva a hann oc at minnaz bonda oc buþægna oc allrar annarrar alþyðu þeira er riki hans hallda upp mæð vercnaðe eða annarri at vinnu* (*Skuggsjá*, Prologue, chap 120, pp. 1, 92).

1341 Bishop of Myra (d. 343), present-day Demre in Turkey.

1342 *NikSgErkb II*, chap 166, p. 156.

1343 *ÓlHlSer*, chap 213, pp. 557–558 (ll. 18–11), recycled in *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 216, p. 370.

1344 Where *Morkinskinna* lists King Ingi's councillors, retainers, *búǫndum ok búþegnum*, and all *alþýða*, the slightly later redaction of the 1139 AD letter in *Heimskringla* jumps over and omits *búǫndum ok búþegnum* by, apparently, counting them among the *alþýða*.

1345 *En af því trausti er hann þóttisk hafa af ástsemð lýðsins, lét hann sér lifanda sverja Magnúsi syni sínum landit í ǫllum Nóregi*;

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The safest conclusion might be that ON plur. *þegnar* can contextually assume the meaning "inhabitants of an area/country, people, nation" and that it implicitly and definitionally presupposes political entitlement of a broad range. A *thegn* may be well-off or not so much but remains a member of a Scandinavian (at this stage, Old Norse–Icelandic, to be exact) body politic nonetheless, even if his role presupposes acclamation more than own pro-activity. Notwithstanding, the allowed syntactic and compositional variations make an impression that Old Norse–Icelandic authors seem to be divided as to how to rank the social category that could pass as ON *þegnar*. A, hopefully elegant, solution to such discrepancy may amass to the following: authors adjust their lexical choice on the understanding that *thegns* are the social elite whose status is not solicited from a king. In such quality they, for one, can represent the lower and broader strata (which is why they sometimes count as "both rich and poor" or included into the *alþýða*). For the other, they will be topped by kings' liegemen only when it is historically appropriate (so, in Norway of the 1130s and 1250s, but not in Þrœndalǫg in the mid-10th or Iceland in the early 11th century) and otherwise remain the sole group of 'everyone who mattered'.

4.3.1.3 (**legally**) **free person**

12 elements in 10 sources contain 23 instances of the alliterative antonymous (contrastive) ON syndetic formula *þegn ok þræll* (lit. *thegn* and slave, bondman) and its Old East Norse metathetic variant, *þræll sem þegn*.[1346] Curiously, they occur only in prose, and the genre selection is limited to secular legislation, sagas, and biblical paraphrase. The earliest this formula enters the corpus is at the turn of the 12th century in *Sverris Saga* ("The Saga of King Sverrir")[1347] and it remains in circulation for about two centuries, until it last occurs in an indigenous Icelandic chivalric *Adonias Saga* ("The Saga of Adonias").[1348] Matters pertaining to medieval Scandinavian slavery are manyfold and complex.[1349] Important for this section is the notion of (un)freedom tackled in §1.5.2.2, also because the formula under discussion is silent on any other aspects of slavery, such as submission to a master, economic exploitation, humiliation, etc.

The alliterative ON formula *þegn ok þræll* does not at all resist elucidation of its meaning: "all people". The mid-13th-century Old Norse adaptation of the Old Testament from the Book of Joshua to II Kings (*Stjórn III*) communicates this idea in a manner that allows cross-checking. Where in the Vulgate the Judaic King Rehoboam, upon arriving to Jerusalem, mustered "all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin",[1350] in Old Norse the

…vildi konungrinn með þeim eiðstaf staðfesta eið lýðsins ok ríki sunar síns; *…dregsk nú í tvá staði hirðin ok hǫfðingjar ok alþýða* ('Because of the support he felt he had through the people's love, Sigurðr had the whole of Norway swear allegiance to his son Magnús while he still lived; With this oath the king wished to confirm the oath of the people and thus secure his son's rule...; ...the court, the chieftains and the people split into two groups'; *Ágrip*, chaps 56–58, pp. 50–51).

1346 *ÄVgL*, Mandråpsbalken §13, p. 32; *YVgL*, Mandråpsbalken §27, p. 27.

1347 The saga was commissioned by King Sverrir (r. 1177/1185–1202) in his lifetime and likely finished shortly after his death, hence the possible dating to 1185×1210 AD (Pulsiano and Wolf 1993, pp. 364, 628). The saga has been object of many a study in the recent years, e.g., Bagge 1993; Wellendorf 2014; Jakobsson 2015; Orning and Rosén 2021, to name a few.

1348 The text must have been written at the turn of the 14th century, as is witnessed by a one-leaf fragment AM, MS 567 Vib 4° from *c.* 1400 AD (Pulsiano and Wolf 1993, p. 2).

1349 In particular, the following items were consulted: Lindkvist and Myrdal 2003; Myrdal 2011; Iversen 2011b; Iversen 2019; Brink 2021.

1350 *…universam domum Juda, et tribum Benjamin* (I Kings 12:21).

king "assembled *thegn* and *thrall* of all the kingdom of Judah and Benjamin".[1351] In fact, the ON collocation *at stefna saman* (more rarely: *at samna*) *þegn ok þræll* ("to gather *thegn* and *thrall*") occurs so regularly (12 times) and consistently (always when describing military mobilisation) that it must have been a fixed idiomatic expression to denote a full army levy.[1352] It is only rivalled by the legal ON phrase *þá skal fara* (*bæði*) *þegn ok þræll* ("then should go [both] *thegn* and *thrall*") that thrice occurs in Norwegian legal provisions on the military summons.[1353] The stipulations are all the same and threaten outlawry to any defector.

They cannot be younger than 1152 AD. That year during his visit to Scandinavia, the papal legate Nicholas Breakspear (*c.* 1100–1159; from 1154 AD, Pope Adrian IV)[1354] laid down the *Canones Nidrosienses* ("The Niðaróss Canons") and decreed clerics to be exempt from any royal military expedition except full levy (NORW. *stevneleidang*)

> [...] or if a pagan army perchance invades the kingdom, to repel which the law of fatherland compels to go both the free and unfree.[1355]

Nicholas was evidently describing an already existing practice, also because the provision touches more on the ecclesiastical contributions to war rather than that of the laity. Alliterative formulae, sometimes with quasi-superfluous meanings, likely were a traditional mnemonic device that frequently surfaces in Scandinavian *Provincial Laws*.[1356] This particular one, however, was for the first time recorded in England, where Archbishop Wulfstan used it in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (see full text below, n. 1470). It cannot be known if he was the first to discover the social potential in the discussed alliterative jingle or integrated a pre-existing genuinely Old Norse stock phrase into his speech. Howbeit, this particular English connexion will be of importance in discussing research QUESTION 3, addressed in §5.3, and what *thegns*' presence on both coasts of the North Sea can say. In the saga genre, the formulaic nature of the "*thegn* and *thrall*" expression shines through in contexts when *bændr*, in their armed confrontation with Norwegian kings, would marshal an army of "*thegns* and *thralls*".[1357]

The formulaic character does not obstruct one from establishing that *thralls* were considered people from a *thegn*'s household. According to *Gulaþingslǫg*, the summoned to military duties accounted for those in their household liable to service as well as the freed people (ON *leysingi*) who have not been fully emancipated and those fully-freed who could not afford military service.[1358] "Every person" (ON *hverr*) was to provide supplies for himself and

1351 …*stefndi hann* [*Roboam*] *at ser þegn oc þręli um allt riki iuda ok beniamín* (*Stjórn*, II, p. 1059 [ll. 4–5]). Comprehensive studies of *Stjórn* include Kirby 1986 (on whose dating from pp. 5 and 63 I rely) and Astås 1991. The last-cited author also published extensively on *Stjórn* in Norwegian, including the latest edition of the text itslef (2009).

1352 *Stjórn III*'s deployment of this formula to translate the Vulgate's LAT. *convocaverunt omnes qui accincti errant* ("they [the Moabites] gathered everyone who could bear arms") in II Kings 3:21 illustrates this point exceptionally clearly (*Stjórn*, II, p. 1130 [l. 9]).

1353 *EGulL* §312, p. 168; *LL,* Landevernsbolken §3, I, p. 229 (recycled in *BæjrL*, Landværnsbolk §3, pp. 200–201).

1354 On this visit, see Bergquist 2003. Papal medieval missions to Scandinavia more generally get covered by Jezierski 2020.

1355 …*vel si forte paganus exercitus regnum intraverit, ad quos debellandos liberos et servos patria* [*sic!*] *lex ire compellit* (no. 7 in Vandvik 1959, p. 44).

1356 Brink 2005, pp. 75–77, – although *cf.* Landro 2019.

1357 *Sverris Saga*, chap 162, p. 249; chap 167, p. 263; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 65, pp. 314–315 (recycled in *ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 163, pp. 367–386; occurs in AM, MS 61 fol.); *ÓlHlSer*, chap 109, pp. 313–314 (ll. 5–7); chap 213, pp. 557–558 (recycled in *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 121, p. 207–208; chap 216, p. 370).

1358 *EGulL* §296, p. 160.

his comrades (ON *lagsmenn*) or house folks (ON *heimamenn*). Bondspeople probably filled in non-combatant supportive roles, as is hinted at in *Gulaþingslǫg* (though that clause speaks of *sveinar*),[1359] and *Gulaþingslǫg* also rewards a *thrall* with manumission for killing an enemy.[1360] It would therefore seem that despite the formulaic nature of the ON collocation *þegn ok þræll*, at the earliest stages, at least in the legal genre, it actually meant what it said: in the same clause on military provisions, King Magnús's later legislation omits this provision, which probably reflects and coincides with the phasing out of earlier forms of bondage. Elder *Gulaþingslǫg* also presupposes indiscriminate entitlement to compensation to both "*thegn* and *thrall*" for unlawful seizure of horses and physical injuries.[1361] In the latter case, because an elucidation of what concrete compensation must cover harm inflicted upon the unfree follows the general statement, one may once again suspect a social application more than a rhetorical device.

Not accounted for in the numerical data at the beginning of the current section because of them being proper nouns, *thegns* and *thralls* further figure in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* ("The Tale of Rígr", dated by Christopher Sapp to the 13th century). Here, they figure as personal names of eponymous primogenitors of the Scandinavian social groups. In the poem, the god Heimdallr visits three couples who bear speaking names ("great-grandfather", "great-grandmother", etc.) and conceives with them Þræll – the progenitor of bondpeople (*þræla ættir*) and toilers, – Karl, – the progentior of the free (*karla ættir*) and able householders, – and Jarl, – the progenitor of the chieftainly rulers and aristocratic warriors. Karl had twelve sons (and ten daughters), among them Þegn, Drengr, Hǫldr, Bóndi.[1362] *Rígsþula* is, obviously, a classical specimen of an origin myth created to explain and sanctify the social order of things. *Gulaþingslǫg* emphasised, for that matter, that calling a free man (ON *karlmaðr frjáls*) a slave (ON *þræll*) was a grave insult and required a full atonement.[1363] There can be found further verbal appositions of free men and *thralls* (ON *frjáls* [*maðr*] *eða/elligar þræll*; *þræll eða bóndi*) in the earliest Norwegian[1364] and Swedish legislation.[1365] Important is the conceptual framework of *Rígsþula*'s anonymous author who firmly associated *thegns* with a status group between the lowest and highest strata.

As a side-note, it is interesting to compare the ON formula *þegn ok/sem þræll* against various Old English collocations on the "earls-and-churls" template (above, §3.3.11.1). They share mnemonic qualities as a linguistic device (alliteration and root-rhyme, respectively) and see similar use. And yet, the Old English collocations in question cover only the free Anglo-Saxon populace, whereas the Old Norse is a shorthand for "all people as a whole". Why this is so deserves, perhaps, a separate study, though the obvious line of argumentation would be the role of slavery in corresponding societies that produced such formulae. In

1359 *Sa scal matgerðar mann fa. er sveina a i skípreiðu* ('Those who have slaves in the warship district should provide the cook'; *EGulL* §300, p. 162).

1360 *…oc verðr þræll mannzbane. þa er hann fríals. þo at fyr være hann þræll* ('...and a slave kills an enemy, then he is a free man though he was a slave before; *EGulL* §312, p. 168).

1361 *EGulL* §92, p. 82; and §215, p. 129.

1362 *Rígsþula* 22.

1363 *EGulL* §196, p. 124. The younger *Västgötalagen* contains a similar statement: calumniation against a person about his *thrall*'s status required cleansing with eighteen co-oath-takers and a compensation of three marks (*YVgL*, Additamentum 2:13, p. 224) – this could, although by no means have to, be a Norwegian influence (see above, n. 1329).

1364 *EGulL* §§204, 261–262, pp. 126, 144–145; *FrostL*, IV §4, p. 174, and XV §16, p. 257.

1365 *ÄVgL*, Rättlösabalken §9, p. 94 (replaced with *annoþogher* in *YVgL*, Rättlösabalken §20); *YVgL*, Tjuvabalken §21, p. 166.

England, with its earlier developed seigneurial economy, the proportion of legally enslaved population was as low as, perhaps, some 10% (ca. 28 thousand households; if this figure instead stands for the total number of individuals, the percentage was even lower)[1366] by the time of the Domesday inquest.[1367] Conversely, in late Viking-Age Scandinavia, this proportion varied between one fourth and one fifth.[1368] Later still in Norway, according to some estimations, the number reached ca. 20–30% (between 50 and 70 thousand, according to some estimations based on *Frostuþingslǫg*).[1369] Noteworthily, the formula *þegn ok þræll* is missing from the Icelandic legislative *Grágás*, recorded in extant form in two redactions in the 1250–1270s. This is probably because in this country, slavery waned earliest, already in the 12th century – *cf.* Denmark and Norway, where it existed in the 13th century, and Sweden, formally abolished by 1335 AD.[1370] Simply put, the ON alliterative collocation *þegn ok þræll* originated and survived longest in social environments where it possessed the most lexical-conceptual relevance to their members.

4.3.1.4 warrior

For the purposes of comparison with Old English, the sense "(generic) warrior" (i.e. not conditioned by a *genetivus possessivus* or contexts of royal allegiance) deserves attention. Merely 16 sources and 17 elements therein, with a total of 27 hits, meet these criteria. In terms of genre, four appeared on the list: skaldic, Eddic, chivalric poetry, and historical narrative. As regard the latter two, these are medieval Swedish adaptations of chivalric romance, *Herr Ivan Ljonriddaren* ("Lord Ywain the Lion Knight", adaptation of Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*)[1371] and *Konung Alexander* ("King Alexander", adaptation of the *Historia de Preliis*),[1372] and *Erikskrönikan* ("The Chronicle of Erik").[1373] All three were written in the 14th century (1302, 1375 AD, and the 1320s, accordingly), and so are of secondary importance. The earliest we meet this sense is in the second half of the 10th century, more specifically in skaldic stanzas by Egill Skallagrímsson (*c.* 904 – *c.* 995),[1374] Glúmr Geirason (d. *c.* 970),[1375] Einarr Skálaglamm Helgason (10th century),[1376] and Úlfr Uggason (second half of the 10th century).[1377]

In and of themselves, these instances do not supply nuances or details. *Thegns* in them are generic warriors with little to no unique attributes: they attack,[1378] they die,[1379] they

1366 A discussion is given by Pelteret 2001, pp. 185–193.
1367 Iversen 2019, p. 61; Brink 2021, p. 58. Various estimation techniques and demographic results of the Domesday survey are provided by Hinde 2003, pp. 15–19. Conversely, a higher number and alternative computational methods are used by Hinton 2013.
1368 Zachrisson 2021, pp. 102–103; Sigurðsson and Riisøy 2011, p. 31.
1369 Iversen 2011b, p. 265 (n. 7). Some numerical data on the Nordic demographics shortly before the Black Death have been collected by Benedictow 2003, pp. 246–249.
1370 Brink 2021, pp. 217–272.
1371 The romance is a part of *Eufemiavisorna* ("The Euphemia Poems"), so named after Queen Euphemia of Rügen (*c.* 1280–1312). Of the recent most studies in English, see the collected volume Ferm, Lodén, and Pettersson 2015.
1372 An introductory English overview has been written by Ashurst and Vitti 2011. An in-depth study (in Swedish) of this romance is by Jansson 2015.
1373 For an overview, see the introduction by Eva Österberg in Carlquist and Hogg 2012, pp. 7–26.
1374 Egill Lv 6.
1375 Glúmr *Gráf* 1.
1376 Eskál *Vell* 10.
1377 ÚlfrU *Húsdr* 12.
1378 Hfr *ErfÓl* 21.
1379 Glúmr *Gráf* 1.

get praised by poets,[1380] they ambush,[1381] etc. Perhaps, semantically worth noting is only the suggested aura of ennobled, heroic warfare *thegns* engage in – never are they coerced recruits or forced conscripts. These qualities likely have to do with the thematic orientation and rules of the genres in question. In the Swedish 14th-century texts, *thegns* are synonymous with knights.[1382] The appearance of OSW. *þæghn*(*a*) is nearly always dictated by the poetic meter, more specifically by its ability to form rhymes: with OSW. *hæghna* (lit. to fence off; *cf.* MODE *hain*), *væghna* (lit. side, direction; *cf.* MODE *way*), *læna* (lit. to lend/borrow; *cf.* MODE *loan*), *fræghna* (lit. to ask, inquire).

Hardly coincidental is the lack of prose texts in this assemblage. By far, we are dealing with a pristine case of hyponymy, as discussed by Lauren Goetting (see VIGNETTE 2), where ON *þegn* functions as a subtype of ON *maðr*, here a supertype. On most occasions, drawing a dividing line between a more general sense, "man", and a more tapered down, "armed man, warrior", may in fact be impossible due to the genre specificity that promoted semantical entanglement.

If we loosen up the criteria a bit and allow on the list fragments in which the martial sense of ON *þegn* gets conveyed also with the syntactical help of *genetivus possessivus* (or where it is contextually implied), the catalogue will include 8 extra sources with 9 elements and another 9 entries in them (only 7 of them unique).[1383] These include both prose and poetic texts, yet again they contribute little extra informative substance.

All things considered, the autonomous sense "warrior" for ON *þegn* must be rejected: this sense is contextually conditioned and straightforwardly hyponymic.

4.3.1.5 an individual of personal/social qualities: "good/bad" *thegn*

20 sources (21 elements) in 24 instances demonstrate rather peculiar semantics in their use of ON *þegn* and its compound *búþegn*: a "person of esteem or worth". The esteem may be both high and, conversely, low. Only texts of the prose format offer passages of this sense. Of them, sagas and *þættir* (lit. strand or thread: short stories or anecdotes integrated into a saga) take up the numerical and proportional majority. Outside these two genres, the meaning is registered once in Norwegian secular legislation (*Landslov*) and once in historical narrative (the list of bishops of Vestrgautland appended to *Västgötalagen*). In this assemblage, only three sources belong to the 14th century and one is later still; the rest are spread along the 13th century.

Most of the textual fragments in this section reveal moral evaluations engaged by their authors. Regular for them is conditioning ON (*bú*)*þegn* by approbatory or, contrarily, censorious adjectives – this happens on 18 occasions. Among the former, the ON adjective *góðr* and its superlative form *beztr* are most prevalent, for the two get paired with ON (*bú*)*þegn* a total of

1380 ÚlfrU *Húsdr* 12.
1381 ǪrvOdd *Ævdr* 26.
1382 *HFN*, l. 1846; *HIL*, ll. 3300, 4031; *KA*, ll. 1272, 8507, 10551.
1383 One instance, when a Jómsvíking chieftain Búi commands his crew to abandon ship in a lost battle of Hjǫrungavágr (ON *Fyrir borð allir Búa þegnar!* ["Overboard all of Búi's *thegns*!"]) occurs in three versions of *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar* ("The Saga of Óláfr Tryggvasson"): the earliest (1180×1220 AD) one by Oddr the Monk (*ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 18 of the Stockh. perg. 4° nr. 18 redaction, p. 183), the slightly later from *Heimskringla* (*ÓlTrHkr*, chap 41, p. 284), and the latest "Greatest" saga (*ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 90, p. 194). Noteworthily, various manuscripts preserve various readings of this phrase: in some, ON *þegnar* is replaced with the generic ON *menn*, while in others with more military specific ON *liðar* (on *lið*, see Jesch 2001, pp. 187–195, and EXCURSUS 2).

8[1384] and 4[1385] times, accordingly. Other laudatory synonyms include ON superlative *mestr* (lit. [ut]most)[1386] and *mikill* (lit. great).[1387] Derogatory adjectives include ON *váligr* (lit. hurtful, wicked; 3 times),[1388] *illr* (lit. evil, bad; twice)[1389] and its superlative form *verstr* (once),[1390] *litill* (lit. little, small; once),[1391] and a collocative ON synonym *ekki mikill* (lit. not great; once).[1392] The regularity ON *góðr/beztr* enjoys in these collocations, as well as a verbatim repetition of one and the same proverb built around the ON collocation *váligir þegnar*,[1393] strongly suggest that these were stable expressions with a tendency to syntactical fixation. A close reading of corresponding contexts can synergise a list of qualities that characterise an individual as a "good" or "bad" *thegn* (Table 5).

	"good" thegnly *qualities*	*"bad"* thegnly *qualities*
moral	tough-mindedness with counteragents	stinginess
	reliability	timidness
	peacefulness/self-possession	falsity
social	generosity	profiteering
	hospitality	inhospitality
	wealth	
	entrepreneurship	
	large retinue (min. 15 people)	
	appreciation by neighbours	
	learnedness	
physical	fitness and strength	
	weapon proficiency	
	giftedness	

Table 5. *Thegnly* qualities in Old Norse texts

Curiously, moral qualities can sometimes negate social attributes: an Icelander by the name of Þórgrímr is said to have been affluent (ON *férikr*) but a "little" *thegn* (ON *lítill búþegn*) (implicitly) because of his aggressiveness and untrustworthiness (ON *ágangsamr ok ótrúr*), which quality he passed on to his sons.[1394] In this connexion it seems likely that when King Har-

1384 *Fóstbræðra Saga*, chap 7, pp. 147–148 (×2); *Vatnsdæla Saga*, chap 7, p. 17; *Fljótsdæla Saga*, chap 19, p. 279; *Grettis Saga,* chap 56, p. 209; *Hrafns Saga*, chap 5, p. 311; *Íslendinga Saga*, chap 448, p. 217; *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §12, I, p. 205 (reproduced in *ÞS* §13, p. 264).

1385 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 91, p. 138 (recycled in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 75, p. 201 [l. 6]); *Svínfellinga Saga*, chap 13, p. 539; *SgÞorBiskÝn*, chap 10, p. 154.

1386 *SgÞorBiskEl*, chap 9, p. 62 (reproduced in *SgÞorBiskÝn*, chap 10, p. 154).

1387 *Christna Biscupär i Swerike*, p. 202.

1388 *Fóstbræðra Saga*, chap 4, p. 137; *Hænsa-Þóris Saga*, chap 6, p. 18; *Gunnars Þáttr*, chap 2, p. 199. The phrase is repeated verbatim without obvious textual links.

1389 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 3, p. 227 (recycled in *ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 44, p. 71, version of AM, MS 61 fol.).

1390 *Christna Biscupär i Swerike*, p. 206.

1391 *Hrafns Þáttr*, chap 1, p. 319.

1392 *Heiðarviga Saga*, chap 24, p. 283.

1393 *Spyrja er bezt til váligra þegna* ("It is best to only hear about wicked *thegns*", i.e. better to know them through hearsay than by an encounter); see above, n. 1388.

1394 *Þorgrímr hét maðr; hann bjó at Stað í Hrútafirði; hann var férikr ok lítill búþegn. Þorgerðr hét kona hans. Synir þeira váru Kálfr ok Grímr, mannaðir at hófi, ágangsamir ok ótrúir í skapi sem faðir þeira* ('There was a man called Thorgrim, who lived at Stad in Hrutafjord. He was rich but not much of a farmer. His wife was called Thorderd, and their sons were Kalf and Grim. They were moderately accomplished, aggressive and untrustworthy by nature, like their father'; *Hrafns Þáttr*, chap 1, p. 319).

aldr Sigurðarson mocked his foster-nephew (above, p. 235) he was discrediting the man's reputation using his father's unfortunate (nick)name. That being said, violence of behalf of "good *thegns*" as a consequence of procuring wealth in seasonal raiding is commended upon. The Norwegian *góðr búþegn* Ingjaldr from the island of Hefni (present-day Hemne at the coast of Hålogaland) was a close friend with a jarl and described as a sturdy *bóndi* who regularly engaged in such plunderous activity.[1395]

A more in-depth comparison with the Old English lexical use will follow in CHAPTER 5, but it is here hard to avoid noting a parallel circulation of the "good-*thegn*" expressions on both coasts of the North Sea. §3.3.11.2 argued that in Anglo-Saxon England, it designated local elites, mostly of provincial calibre. This conclusion leaned upon interchangeable synonymity with similar collocations revolving around OE *mann*, as well as on analysis of socio-political contexts in which they enter the corpus. What is more, the Old Norse–Icelandic textual community clearly shared with the Old English counterpart (and actually wider) some of these lexical expressions, built around the ON adjective *góðr* and its comparative and superlative forms, to denote secular social elites. Absence of serviceable tools to search for Old Norse word combinations obstructs a definitive conclusion how much they permeate the Old Norse corpus. But they would now and then catch the reader's eye even in the sources selected for the current chapter.[1396] In light of close concurrence of ON *bóndi* and *þegn*, as well as a degree of contextually motivated and syntactically permissible synonymity between the latter of the two and ON *maðr* (above, §4.3.1.1), it must be emphasised that on some occasions, the ON *bændr* supplants ON *menn* in the "good/best-people" collocations when those do not refer to kings' close advisors or court but rather to a wider lay elite.[1397]

On a final but no less important note, at least one person described as the *beztr búþegn*, Sæmundr Ormsson (*c.* 1227–1252), and of whom the saga writer remarked that the man would never have less than fifteen followers and often more, was one of Iceland's hereditary chieftains (ON *goði*) in the Eastern Quarter.[1398] For comparison, Erlingr Skjálgsson (more on him below, §4.4.3.3), 'the noblest of all landed men in Norway' (*hafi gofagstr allra lendra manna verit í Nóregi*) at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries is credited with a regular minimum of ninety and during jarls' visits more than two (long?) hundred followers, which *Heimskringla* likened to 'a large following as if it was a royal court' (*svá sem þar væri konungshirð*).[1399] Followings of similar magnitude are ascribed to the late-9th-century son of a *hersir* Þórólfr Kveldúlfson – no less than a (long?) hundred at any time, which made him a

1395 *Vatnsdæla Saga*, chap 7, p. 17.

1396 The following list is by no means exhaustive and serves only the purpose of a cursory illustration: "best men": *EGulL* §255, p. 143; *Ágrip*, chap 27, 33, 51 pp. 28, 32, 47; *Fagrskinna*, chaps 44, 47, 94, pp. 207, 211, 323; *Stjörnu-Odda Draumr*, chap 3, p. 464; Árna Saga, chap 8, p. 12; *Flatø-Annaler*, *s.a.* 1301 AD; *Morkinskinna*, I, chaps 2, 53, pp. 12–19, 302; II, chaps 63, 101, pp. 70, 207; *FrostL*, Prologue §1 (p. 121); *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §§2, 8, 12, I, pp. 169, 196, 210; Mannhelgebolken §§2, 12, I, pp. 301, 352; *Gizurársáttmáli*, p. 461; *ÞS* §15, p. 264: *YngHkr*, chap 20, p. 39; *HaSigHkr*, chaps 4, 45, 71, 79, pp. 73, 127, 161, 175; *ÓlKrHkr*, chap 1, p. 203; *ÓlTrMest*, II, chap 186, 235, pp. 55, 224; *Færeyinga Saga*, chaps 5, 24, 36, 40, pp. 11, 54, 79, 86; *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chaps 23, 46, 64, 65, pp. 217, 277, 333, 343, – all in the of the AM, MS 310 4° redaction; "good men": *Fóstbræðra Saga*, chap 12, p. 182; *Svínfellinga Saga*, chap 13, p. 538; *Gísls Þáttr*, p. 325; *FrostL*, Prologue §8, p. 123; *Hirðskrá* §3 (6), p. 69, and §29 (34), p. 128; *BjarL*, Kaupangsbolk §2; *ÞS* §§8, 11, 20, p. 262, 264, 266; *ÞB*, Bréf Magnúss konungs, p. 3, and Um helga trú §2, p. 26; "better men": *ÞorSgSk*, chap 374, p. 20.

1397 E.g., *HákHák*, II, chap 374, p. 223; *Íslendinga Saga*, chap 475, p. 269; *Gizurársáttmáli*, p. 461.

1398 *Svínfellinga Saga*, chap 13, p. 539.

1399 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 22, pp. 28–30

ríkr maðr[1400] – and to Geirmundr Heljarskinn (more on him below, §4.4.2.1), eighty whom he took to Iceland.[1401] Common to these three Norwegians was that their retinues were composed of the lords' former former slaves (ON *frelsingi*), though.

Overall, the social roles such "good people" fulfilled in Scandinavia overlap with the observed situation in England.[1402] Presupposing a cultural influence one or the other way from the observed lexical and contextual coincidences alone is not without its methodological problems. As stated above (n. 675), such lexical realisations of a concept of an elite used to be widespread in various medieval societies (and beyond).[1403] This may well be a case of an *ana*logy rather than *homo*logy, or if it were the latter nonetheless, the roots were probably so deep as to hardly matter. More attention to Scandinavian *thegns* acting in elite capacities, including some very reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon precedent, will follow below. At this point, the crucial take-away should be that the personal and social qualities associated with "good" and "bad" *thegns* in Scandinavia do not contradict and may broadly agree with one (chronologically derivative, as suggested) social notion found in OE *þegnscipe* studied in CHAPTER 3, more specifically material prosperity. On other, evaluative points, such as uprightness and social integrity, ON *þegnskapr* comes closely to OE *þegenlīc*(*e*) (above, §3.3.7). This evident parallelism leads into the next section.

4.3.1.6 *thegnship*

ON *þegnskapr* (lit. *thegnship*) is 3.5 times more often registered in the corpus compared to its Old English cognate, occurring 44 times in 5 secular prose sources and once in a secular skaldic stanza. The majority of occurrences (37, of them 27 unique)[1404] belong to *Grágás* and thus will be presently put to the side until §4.4 (below).

Unsurprisingly in the context of "good/bad-*thegn*" collocations, the only prose genre besides the legal *Grágás* to contain ON *þegnskapr* are sagas. These are four *Íslendingasögur*, and save *Grettis Saga* ("The Saga of Grettir the Strong"), were likely recorded in the 13th century. The anonymous *lausavísa* from *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* ("The Saga of Ragnarr Loðbrókr") that contains the last item of interest for the current section, may be somewhat earlier. From Snorri Sturluson's familiarity with it follows that the *lausavísa* had existed by the 1220s, but as remarked by Rory McTurk, it deviates from the strict *dróttkvætt* meter, suggesting a late composition.[1405] With respect to varying opinions on the four sagas' dates of origins[1406] and with such a limited pool, attempts at tracing any semantical evolution appear futile.

1400 *Eglis Saga*, chap 10, p. 13 (ll. 23–24).

1401 *Landnámabók*, p. 153.

1402 See further: Love et al. 2020, p. 128 (*s.v.* "goþir mæn/gothe mæn/góðir menn"), and a fundamental study by Helle 1972, summarised in English by Bagge 2010, pp. 340–342.

1403 Helle 1972, pp. 23–38, discussed at length the origin and spread of the "good-men" terminology in medieval Norway. While agreeing with a significant cultural influence from the British Isles, he reservedly concluded that, "concrete situations of influence cannot be demonstrated" (*...konkrete påvirkningssituasjoner kan ikke påvises*; p. 36). Conversely, Philip Line, with reference to Carl Löfving, passed over Helle's reservations and straightforwardly explained the Norwegian "good men" of the High Middle Ages as originally 'having apparently spread from England to all parts of Scandinavia' (Line 2007, p. 63).

1404 The remaining, with insignificant variations, are common to both redactions, *Konungsbók* and *Staðarhólsbók*, and thus are not unique.

1405 *SkP* VIII:2, pp. 622–623.

1406 *Fóstbræðra Saga* ("The Saga of the Sworn Brothers"): *Íslenzk Fornrit* places it around *c.* 1200 AD, but Jónas Kristjánson shifted the date to after 1250 AD and Vésteinn Ólason counts it among the "early sagas" (*c.* 1200–1280); *Vápnfirðinga Saga* ("The Saga of the People of Vopnafjord"): written in *c.* 1225×1250 AD according to *Íslenzk Fornrit*, but the *Complete Sagas of Icelanders* series holds it to have been written down in the

Four instances of ON *þegnskapr* demonstrate a striking conformity with what qualities surround notions of "good" or "bad *thegn*" (above, Table 5), namely, all four sagas associate *thegnship* with generosity, magnanimity, socialness, and (once) courage. One Þórkell is reprimanded by an anonymous author for being of "little *thegnship*" despite his affluence;[1407] conversely, one Steinbjǫrn is said to have become so impoverished through his *thegnship* so that he had to sell his farmstead at Hof;[1408] a resident of Reykjahólar by the name of Þórgils was a "man of great *thegnship*" and stood a welcoming host for all free men in his district, thereby attracting a number of them to his side and enjoying popularity.[1409] Finally, the protracted and dramatic feud in *Brennu-Njáls Saga* culminates in reconciliation when one of the participants, Kári, and his crew got stranded after a shipwreck and decided to test Flosi's, their opponent, *thegnship* and turned to him to avoid freezing to death. Flosi took a good care of them and even wedded his niece to Kári.[1410] The *lausavísa* from *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar* adds a spin on these personal qualities associated with *thegnship*. It is ascribed to one of the followers of Ragnarr's sons when he and his comrade engage in a verbal duel (ON *mannjafnaðr*) at a royal funeral feast. One accuses the other of a lack of *thegnship* and favouring stay-at-home banqueting:

> Speak of your *thegnship*! I venture to ask you: where did you see a raven, full of blood, fluttering on a branch? You received from others, [and were] found in the high seat, more often than you could have dragged bloody corpses into a valley for {carnage-birds} [RAVENS/EAGLES].[1411]

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late 13th century, while Ólason again groups it with other "early sagas"; *Brennu-Njáls Saga* ("Njal's Saga"): believed by the *Íslenzk Fornrit* editors to have been commissioned to parchment in *c.* 1275×1285 AD, by their colleagues from the *Complete Sagas of Icelanders* series in the late 13th century, and by Ólason's classification, sometime when "classical sagas" were being written down in 1240–1310 AD (see above, p. 234). In case of the last-mentioned saga, considered by some to stand at the pinnacle of the saga art, a further complication springs from an incredibly ramified manuscript stemma: Lethbridge and Óskarsdóttir 2018. In case of *Grettis Saga*, the text is considered young by saga standards: almost everyone seems to agree that the text was written after 1300 AD, though as often, *Íslenzk Fornrit* puts it at the beginning of the century.

1407 *Þorkell hét maðr, er bjó í Gørvidal. Hann var vel fjáreigandi, en lítill í þegnskap, en eirinn í skaplyndi, huglauss í hjarta* ('There was a man named Thorkel who lived at Gervidal. He was wealthy but not generous, preferred his own company and was rather faint-hearted'; *Fóstbrœðra Saga*, chap 6, p. 142).

1408 *En Steinbjǫrn bjó at Hofi, sonr Refs ins rauða. Ok er honum eyddist fé fyrir þegnskapar sakar þá keypti Þorsteinn Hofsland ok bjó þar sex tigu vetra* ('At that time Steinbjorn, son of Ref the Red, was living at Hof. When he had ruined himself by open-handedness, Thorstein bought Hofsland and lived there sixty years'; *Vápnfirðinga Saga*, chap 1, p. 23).

1409 *Hann* [*Þorgils*] *var svá mikill þegnskaparmaðr, at hann gaf hverjum frjálsum manni mat, svá lengi sem þiggja vildi; varð af þessu jafnan fjǫlmennt á Reykjahólum; hafði Þorgils rausn mikla af búnaði sínum. Hann var góðgjarn maðr og forvitri* ('Thorgils was so charitable that he would give food to all free-born men for as long as they cared to accept it, so there was always a large number of people with him at Reykjaholar. Thorgils enjoyed great honour for his generosity, and was a kind and wise man'; *Grettis Saga*, chap 27, p. 91).

1410 *Kafahríð var á. Þeir spyrja Kára, hvat þá skyldi til ráðs taka, en hann segir þat ráð sitt at fara til Svínafells og reyna þegnskap Flosa. Gengu þeir þá til Svínafells í hríðinni. Flosi var í stufu. Hann kenndi Kára ok spratt upp í móti honum og minntisk við hann og setti hann í hásæti hjá sér. Hann bauð Kára at vera þar um vetrinn; Kári þá þat. Sættusk þeir þá heilum sáttum. Gipti Flosi þá Kára Hildigunni, bróðurdóttur sína, er Hǫskuldr Hvítanesgoði hafði átta* ('The snow was falling thickly. Kari's men asked him what he advised them to do, and he said that it was his advice to go to Svinafell and find out how magnanimous Flosi was. They walked to Svinafell through the snowstorm. Flosi was in the main room. He recognised Kari at once and jumped up to meet him and kissed him, and then placed him in the high seat by his side. He invited Kari to stay there for the winter, and Kari accepted. They made a full reconciliation. Flosi then gave to Kari in marriage his brother's daughter, Hildigunn, who had been the wife of Hoskuld the Godi of Hvitanes'; *Njála*, chap 159, pp. 462–463).

1411 *Seg þú frá þegnsköpum þínum! Þik ráðumz ek spyrja: hvar sáttu hrafn á hríslu hrolla dreyrafullan? Optar þáttu at öðrum í öndvegi fundinn, en þú dreyrug hræ drægir í dal fyrir valfugla* (Anon [*Ragn*] 2; for illustrative purposes, I supplanted McTurk's 'exploits' in the *SkP* translation with "*thegnship*").

The context in the ensuing poetic sparring leaves no doubt that ON *þegnskapr* here assumes the meaning "military prowess". One the one hand, in prose, *thegnship* and attributes of a "good *thegn*" are non-martial and rooted in social context. On the other, one such "good *thegn*" is characterised as proficient in martial arts (ON *vápnfimr*),[1412] and earlier still in the same saga Þórkell, a man of "little *thegnship*", is branded for cowardice or timidness (ON *huglauss í hjarta*).

Brennu-Njáls Saga narrates two episodes that fall neatly into the observed patterns and connect one's *thegnship* with legal eligibility. In chap 96, Njáll uses his legal expertise to persuade the Icelandic law council (ON *lǫgrétta*) led by the seventh lawspeaker Skapti Þóroddsson (in office 1004–1030) to institute a new legal body, the Fifth Court (ON *fimmtardómr*), to complement the already existing four Quarter Courts (ON *fjórðungsdómr*: the four highest judicial bodies in the country, staffed by thirty-six judges each) and hear unresolved cases or when litigants belonged to different Quarters.[1413] The episode serves to promote the plot, namely Njáll's true motive is to extend the number of chieftains (ON *goðar*) and thereby make his foster-son one to meet the marital condition set for the latter by his wife-to-be. The saga's account may be purely fictional,[1414] but the language attributed to Njáll is nevertheless revealing: testimonies in the Fifth Court required two co-oaths "put under one's *thegnship*" (ON *at leggja undir þegnskap sín*). Accordingly, in another episode in chap 144 two warrantors (ON *sannaðarmenn*) vouch for one of the litigants, Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, by "putting under their *thegnship*" his honest intentions. This formula and the very procedure it figures in recur in *Grágás*, and so we may infer their circulation in Iceland in the mid-13th century at the latest. Since *Grágás* was soon after retired, it is probable that both pertained to an earlier period still.

Modern English translators usually render this formula as "swear/vouch on one's honour" or "pledge/give one's word of honour". "Honour" is an elastic term and concept, not least so in traditional societies. With the lexical-contextual analysis performed above, it seems appropriate enough to narrow down "honour" in this formula to encompass one's social reputation and integrity. We thus may arrive at the following definition of Old Norse–Icelandic *thegnship*: a socially approved of and revered behaviour that ensured social prominence and entitlement won by benevolent altruism and leadership. The latter quality appears predominantly civil. But in a society with no truly discrete martial branch, when civil prominence partially depends on military prowess, it is easy to comprehend how and why it could also spill over into martial spheres in appropriate situations (*cf.* above, §4.3.1.4).

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Overall, ON *þegn* and its compounds, when they are contextually independent of monarchy, seem to orbit one of the fundamental Scandinavian social phenomena: the *bóndi*, a conceptual centrepiece in the secular social fabric in the North. The *bændr* are generally a reactive political agent, but their elite, commonly verbally distinguished as "the best" or "the rich/powerful", are those who interact most with kingship – and so, apparently, do *thegns*. Whenever Old Norse–Icelandic medieval texts characterise a *thegn* as "good/bad"

1412 *Þorgils hét maðr er bjó að Lækjamóti í Víðidal. Hann var mikill maðr og sterkr, vápnfimr, góðr búþegn* ('There was a man named Thorgils who lived at Laekjarmot in Vididal. He was a big, strong man, skilful in the use of weapons and a good farmer'; *Fóstbræðra Saga*, chap 7, p. 147).

1413 Love et al. 2020, p. 94 (*s.v.* "fjórðungsdómr").

1414 See details on the Icelandic legal organisation by Karlsson 2005, pp. 508–512, and p. 511 more specifically on the Fifth Court.

or discuss someone's *thegnship*, they unequivocally point at the person's social appreciation by his milieu with an elitist ring to it. ON *góðr* before *þegn* as a designator of a rank in a royal retinue (above, p. 66) or *Königsnähe*, as suggested by the Sawyers,

> [...] is stretching, or rather contracting the meaning of a word normally used to show collective approval (as in Magnus the Good) or excellence of its kind (a good year, friend, dog). Something like "respectable" would be a safer translation, if vague, and closer to the normal West European analogues...[1415]

Lexically, ON *þegn* also appears largely hyponymous and within permitted textual interchangeability with ON *maðr*. *Manna Heiti*, unfamiliar with modern technical vocabulary, indicates exactly that. Interesting is the direction of this hyponymy, or which word's semantics informed the other's. Here, Old Norse prose and poetry treat ON *þegn* differently. In poetry, ON *þegn* often appears as a *heiti* for ON *maðr* in poetical lexical surroundings.[1416] In looser prose texts, ON *þegn* relatively rarely assumes the sense "(generic) person" and more often applies to a rather concrete category of men – the entitled and fully free. ON *þegn* may have warranted hyponymy with ON *maðr* through an initial conceptual overlap with ON *bóndi*, as *Rígsþula* has it. If that were so, it could account for the paucity of cases of a similar hyponymy in Old English, which apparently proceeded from the premise of the narrower sense: "(king/lord's) armed retainer = warrior = man" (above, §3.3.12). Into the same direction may point that OE *þegn* could become contextually synonymous with LAT. *omnis/aliquis homo* (above, p. 171) or explained through/exchanged for various renditions of "free man" in Anglo-Norman Latin texts (above, p. 181), but only in prose and technical contexts of personal patronage and landed proprietorship. Establishing that the hyponymic relations were necessarily as surmised and not the other way around (i.e. a secondary synonymity between ON *þegn* and *bóndi* derivative of a presumed primary synonymity between ON *þegn* and *maðr*), is, however, best left for a further lexicographical and philological study.

The next section will scrutinise Karl Martin Nielsen's scepticism towards any connexion between Scandinavian *thegns* and kings.

4.3.2 ON Þegn *Conditioned by Kingship*

Monarchocentric contexts of ON *þegn* take up a large proportion of all entries (just over a third: 188 times). Most of them employ ON *þegn* in straightforward formulaic use. This circumstance limits the range of possible semantic conclusions, but some remain viable.

4.3.2.1 king's liegeman

15 sources use ON *þegn* 18 times in a sense that seems to correspond best with the concept of "liegeman", which was introduced earlier (above, §1.5.2.1). Both prose and poetic formats share this meaning, six genres among them, and chronologically it first enters the corpus

1415 Christiansen 2002, p. 60.

1416 Already Martin Syrett argued that the presence of ON *þegn* in (skaldic) poetry may be dictated by its alliterative potential and not technical or specific meanings. He drew an example from the *Hǫfuðlausn* ("Head-Ransom") by Óttarr inn Svarti (*c.* 990 – after 1027) composed in about 1023 AD. In the opening *helmingr*, Óttarr had to find an alliterative two-syllable pair to ON *þér* and so he uttered (in prose order) *Hjaltlendingar eru kenndir þér at þegnum* (lit. 'the Shetlanders are known to you as' *thegns*; Ótt *Hfl* 20). Had Óttarr chosen 'the first or third person rather than the second, then phrases such as **mér at mǫnnum* or **honum at hǫlðum* might have been equally acceptable with an equivalent semantic force' (Syrett 1998, p. 262).

around 970 AD in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Berudrápa* ("*Drápa* about a Shield") and lingers until the late 14th century in *Stjörnu-Odda Draumr* ("Star-Oddi's Dream").[1417]

Some cases support the meaning "liegeman" not only through context alone but through genitival syntactical constructions. Egill Skallagrímsson composes *Berudrápa* in response to a gift of a shield he received from Þórsteinn Þóruson, King Hákon Goði's *lendr maðr* in second generation, to believe the prose account framing it. Ergo, Egill's address to Þórsteinn as a king's *thegn*[1418] is not only fully appropriate but contextually consonant with the suggested meaning. An addition to *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta* in one of the extant redactions, *Helga Þáttr Þórissonar* ("Helgi Þórisson's Tale"), narrates about a fantastical encounter of King Óláfr Tryggvasson with a supernatural being, King Guðmundr of Glasisvellir.[1419] Óláfr receives Guðmundr's emissaries led by Helgi, whom Óláfr poetically calls Guðmundr's *thegn*.[1420] In the legendary *Hjálmþés Saga ok Ǫlvis* ("The Saga of Hjálmþér and Ǫlvir") the protagonist enters into the sorcerer King Hundingi's hall and introduces his companion King Hringr who has been magically transformed into a swineherd Hǫrðr. Hundingi responds with a dismissive stanza that Hringr–Hǫrðr does not deserve to sit among the golden-clad (*seggjum þeim er í gullvefjum*) and assigns him to sit farthest among/away from his retainers (ON *seggir*). In the last line, however, Hundingi remarks that Hringr–Hǫrðr will be well-treated together with Hundingi's *thegns*. ON preposition *hjá* in the first line may suggest that Hundingi is not barring Hringr–Hǫrðr from the retinue but merely seats him at the bottom of the hierarchy; thus, Hundingi's liegemen are his *thegns*.[1421] This reading also invites itself on account of a reminiscent parallel at the end of broadly contemporaneous *Arons Saga* ("The Saga of Aron", *c.* 1340 AD). King Hákon Hakónarson visits the protagonist, the Icelander Aron Hjǫrleifsson (*c.* 1200–1255), shortly before death, as if 'his intimate friend or kinsman'. When Aron dies, the king laments the death of his *hirðmaðr* and the best swordsman from "among our *thegns*".[1422] *Stjörnu-Odda Draumr* features close

1417 The dating of this *þáttr* is not without problems: see Rowe 2020, pp. 266–268.

1418 *Heyri fǫ̊rs á forsa fallhadds vinar stalla, hyggi, þegn, til þagnar þinn lýðr, konungs, mína. Opt skal arnar kjapta ǫrð góð of trǫð Hǫrða, hrafnstýrandi hræra hregna, mín of fregna*sk ('Listen, retainer of the king [= Þorsteinn Þóruson], to my waterfalls of the flowing-haired friend of the fire of altars [VOTIVE RITE > HEATHEN GOD = Óðinn > POEM]; may retinue concentrate on silence. Often shall my good produce of the eagle's beak be heard of across the land of the Hǫrðar [= Hordaland = Norway], raven-steerer of ... [SHIP? > SEAFARER? = Þorsteinn]'; Egill *Berdr* 1).

1419 On him, see Tolkien 1960, pp. 84–86.

1420 *Gestr skal einu í gogn taka, meðan Hvítinga hvílask lǫtum. … þenna þegn Goðmundar af samnafna sínum drekki* ('The guest shall take hold of one [horn], while we let the Hvítingar rest. ... this retainer of Guðmundr that he drink from his namesake'; ÓTr Lv 2).

1421 *Lítt honum sæmir hjá seggja liði, þeim er í gullvefjum glóa allir. Siti hann yzt af seggjum mínum; skal honum veita vel með várum þegnum* ('It would hardly be appropriate for him to be among the company of men who all glitter in gold clothing. Let him sit farthest out among my men; he shall be well served among our freemen'; Hundk Lv 4). See comments on ON *hjá* by Richard Harris in the same edition (*SkP* VIII:2, pp. 526–527).

1422 *Í þessi sótt kom konungrinn til hans sem til hugðarmanns eða frænda, ok hefir mönnum þat þótt in mesta sæmð. Ok fekk Aron alla guðsþjónustu, ok eftir þat andaðist hann. En er lík hans var borit til kirkju, gekk konungrinn sjálfr ok hirð hans með líkinu ok stóð sjálfr yfir grefti hans ok mælti þar nökkurum sæmðarorðum. Eru þessi eftir höfð: „Þessi maðr, Aron, várr hirðmaðr, hefir víða farit ok [í] mörgum mannraunum vel prófazt ok í mörgum lífsháska staddr verit, ok viljum vér því orði á lúka," segir konungr, „at hér hefir látizt eitt it bezta sverð af várum þegnum."* ('Daring this illness the king came to him, as to his intimate friend or kinsman, and men thought that a very great honour. And Aron received all the holy sacraments, and after that he died. And when his body was carried to the church, the king himself and all his retinue went with the body, and stood over his grave himself, and spoke some words of praise there. These words are preserved: "This man, Aron, our retainer, traveled widely, and proved himself well in many dangers, and has stood in great risk of his life and we would like to end with this statement," says the king "that here has died one of the best swordsmen among our thanes"'; *Arons Saga*, chap 22, p. 278).

lexical parallels. The fictional King Geirviðr declares his intentions to his *hirð*, "all of [his] *thegns* and friends".[1423] The legendary King Ingjaldr from a similarly late *Áns Saga Bogsveigis* ("The Saga of Án the Bow-Bender") convenes an assembly and invites his *thegns* to join him in his quest to seek out his brothers and even promises provisions for his men.[1424] The motif of kingly generosity toward his *thegns* resurfaces in *Sigurðarbálkr* ("*Bálkr* about Sigurðr") by Ívarr Ingimundarson (before 1093 – *c.* 1139), when the poet describes the Norwegian pretender King Sigurðr Slembidjákn's (d. 1139) expedition from Norway to Sweden in 1137 AD:

> The ruler's *thegns*, tested in magnanimity, rushed to the ropes in the roaring rainstorm. Men had to tend the sail and some bailed; then it was cold at sea.[1425]

Occasionally, a commendation-like relationship follows from the lexical variation, namely when the subordinate party's status is referred to as ON *þegn ok þjón*(*stumaðr*) (lit. *thegn* and servant), immediately reminiscent of OE *þegnas ond þeōwas*. *Stórn III* uses it to translate LAT. *servus tuus* in the Judaic King Ahaz's plea to King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria for help (II King 16:7).[1426] Emperor Nero from *Pétrs Saga Postola I* ("The I Saga of Peter the Apostle") accuses the apostle Paul of an intention to rob him of his *thegns* and servants from under his lordship.[1427] In a didactic passage from Pope Gregory's *Dialogi*, the Ostrogothic King Totila sent his armed bodyguard (LAT. *spatharius*, lit. sword-bearer) and three retainers (LAT. *comites*) in his stead to St Benedict. An Old Norse translator styled the decoy as a king's servant and his escort as the king's *thegns* and servants.[1428]

The specimens suggest that part of this relationship presupposed mutual affection by both parties, as is revealed in the formula, "the ruler rejoices with his *thegns* and *thegns* with him".[1429] Interesting to note is that it occurs in descriptions of royal depression, and so

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1423 *Nú vil ek ok því lýsa fyrir öllum yðr, mínum þegnum ok virktavinum, at ek ætla mér at fara til móts við berserkina, þá Garp ok Gný, er liggja á Jöruskógi ok gera þar mörg illvirki* ('I wish to make known to you all, my subjects and friends, that I intend to go and fight the berserks Garp and Gny, who are lying out in Joruskog and committing so many misdeeds there'; *Stjörnu-Odda Draumr*, chap 3, p. 464).

1424 *Þat er mönnum kunnigt, at faðir minn er dauðr ok ek á ríkit þetta, ok vil ek því lýsa, at ek vil þeim öllum yfirbætr veita, er ek hefi af gert við, ok gefa þeim ok öllum yðr góð lög. En til ferðar skylda ek yðr, mína þegna, ok sækja á fund bræðra minna, ok vér mættum semja friðsamliga vár ríki, ok mun ek fá mínum mönnum vistir ok mungát* ('It is known to men that my father is dead and I hold the realm. I wish to proclaim that I will grant compensation to all those whom I have transgressed against, and give good laws to them and to all of you. But I require you, my thanes, to go on a journey with me and seek out my brothers, so that we may peacefully set our kingdom in order. I will provide my men with food and ale'; Áns Saga, chap 4, p. 377).

1425 *Drifu til reipa í rot uveðri reyndir at risnu ræsis þegnar. Urðu seggir segls at gæta, — þá vas svalt á sæ — en sumir jósu* (Ív *Sig* 15). I replaced 'retainers' from *SkP*'s translation with "*thegns*" for illustrative purposes.

1426 *Stjórn*, II, p. 1182 (l. 13). Interesting to note is how the same source (at p. 559) translated LAT. *regna* […] *servientium* (lit. kingdoms [...] serving [King Solomon]) in I Kings 4:21 as *höfðingiar oc rikissmenn* […] *honvm* […] *þionoðv* (lit. chieftains and powerful men [...] served him) – AM, MS 226 fol., however, reads *þegnadu* in place of the last word.

1427 *Heyr nu, maðr hins mikla konungs en minn fangi! Hvar fyrir dirfiz þu at fara i Romariki ok raða þegna ok þionostumenn undan mer, en kalla undir þik riddara oc herferð vars höfðingskapar?* ("Lo the great king's man who is my captive! What for do you dare come to the Roman Empire to deprive me of *thegns* and servants subjected to me, and gather knights and host of our lordship?"; *PétSgPost I*, chap 125, p. 113).

1428 *En es hann var a lép comenn, þa nam* [*hann stapar. þionn hans*] *.i. het Riggo vén at aliti, þann* [*scrvde hann scruþi sino oc sende til* [*munklifs Benedictus, oc let hann*] *fvlgia honom þa þegna oc þiona, er kononge voro vanir at fvlgia, oc g*[*vþs maþr metti þat hv*]*ggia, at þar veri konongrinn sialfr* ("And when he approached the gate, he took the place of one of his servants, called Riggo handsome in appearance. He then dressed in his garments and sent him to Benedict's monastery. He commanded *thegns* and servants, who used to follow the king, to follow Riggo so that God's man would think that this is the king himself"; *Dialógar*, book II, chap 14, p. 211).

1429 *Seig hon svá í ǫsku, en konungr steig til vizku ok hugði af heimsku, styrði síðan ríki sínu ok styrkðki; gladdisk hann af þegnum*

may infer that such behaviour was expected of a king – or, to hedge our bets, that royal success was conceptualised as rooted in emotional unity with his *comitatus*.

Finally, chivalric *Erex Saga* ("The Saga of Eric"), an Old Norse (very likely Norwegian) prose adaptation of Chrétien de Troyes's poetic *Erec and Enide*, includes a unique *hapax legomenon*. The saga elaborates on the French original and endows King Arthur with further modesty because upon gazing at a multitude of chieftains (ON *høfðingjar*; lit. headmen; also once recorded in late Old English as OE *hofding* in the Worcester version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*)[1430] gathered by him at his court, the king

> [...] rejoices in his heart but does not pride himself on account of his power over vassals [*þegnavald*].[1431]

4.3.2.2 king's subject

Contexts that allow an understanding of ON *þegn* as "king's subject" on its own are numerous and include 57 hits in 31 sources and 34 elements therein. It enters the corpus early, already in 1023 AD when the skald Óttarr inn Svarti praised King Óláfr Haraldsson for extending domination over the Shetlanders (above, n. 1416), and it would not leave the corpus since. Poetry in this selection is starkly underrepresented with merely four secular skaldic stanzas. Contrarily, prose entries are many and come up in eight genres.

Nearly all of these occurrences include *genetivus possessivus* (alternatively, on very rare occasions: dat. reflexive pronoun). In fact, only four times does is it missing.[1432] Recounting each particular case of this volume would exceed the need, and a brief summary shall follow in the next sub-chapter. For the moment, an epitome of contextual situations that inform this meaning will suffice: they almost invariably feature certain mutual commitments of *thegns* to kings and vice versa. In brief, *thegns*' obligations presuppose loyalty, law-abidance and conformity, as well as fulfilling fiscal obligations and service, including military, though the latter is mentioned only once and even suggest auxiliary roles (ship piloting). Conversely, kings offer all sorts of top-down active and passive protection and arbitration. Noteworthily, these relationships as they appear in texts do not necessitate any first-hand interaction between a king and his subordinates. Instead, it is always mediated – either personally through some middleman (bishop, *sýslumaðr*, messenger, etc.), or via written correspondence, and *thegns* never initiate (petition, approach, visit the monarch, etc.) such contacts.

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sínum, ok þegnar af honum, en ríkit af hvóru tveggja ('She sank thus into ash, but the king [Haraldr inn Hárfagri] rose to wisdom and abandoned his folly; he from then on took control of his kingdom and strengthened it; he was gladdened by his subjects and they by him and the kingdom by them both'; *Ágrip*, chap 4, p. 6; recycled verbatim in *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 25, p. 127); *Herra, at þér skylduð hyggja af harmi ok gleðja vini yðra ok taka upp góða siðvenju sem yðr byrjar, gerst mikilbrjóstaðr sem konungi sómir ok hans tign hæfir, hygg af harmi, gleðst af þegnum, en þegnar af yðr* ("...Lord, you should set aside your grief and make your friends happy and adopt the good customs that befit you, become a great-hearted leader worthy of a king and your dignity, set aside your grief, rejoice in your *thegns*, and let your subjects rejoice in you"; *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 46, p. 272).

1430 Pons-Sanz 2013, pp. 34, 216.

1431 *…glez nú í sínu hjarta en miklar sik eigi af þegnavaldi* (*Erex Saga*, chap 6, p. 234).

1432 Esk *Geisl* 14; *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §12, I, p. 205; *JS* §20, p. 266; King Hákon Hákonarson's law amendment of 1220 AD (no. 5 in *NGL* I, p. 446).

4.3.2.3 associated expressions and compounds

ON *þegn* in the sense of a king's subject figures prominently in a fixed complimentary (suppletive) syndetic formula "land(s) and *thegns*".[1433] A search for this pair returned 37 hits in 19 sources (21 elements) of 6 genres, but its chronology resists a well-defined circumscription. The earliest registration may belong to the Viking Age, as it comes up in the Eddic *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* ("Fragment of a Poem about Sigurðr"),[1434] if one subscribes to Christopher Sapp's dating of the poem to the 10th century (above, p. 229). Sceptics of his method will need to shift the *terminus post quem* only a few decades into the future, because ON *lǫnd ok þegna* was familiar to the skald Þjóðólfr Arnórsson (*c.* 1010 – *c.* 1066) who used it shortly before his demise.[1435] The upper chronological limit should be drawn somewhere in the early 14th century: *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta*'s testimony may be discarded, as the saga recycled verbatim a lot of previous material, but "land and *thegns*" figure in the translated Icelandic chivalric *Partalópa Saga* ("The Saga of Partalópi"), commonly dated to about *c.* 1300 AD.

"Land(s) and *thegns*" is an overwhelmingly immutable stock phrase that finds common use as a shorthand designation of an object of royal power. Worth noting is the lexical consistency: on all occasions do kings assume the grammatical role of a subject in a clause whereas ON *land/lǫnd ok þegnar* are invariably a grammatical object, almost always acted upon with a transitive verb (both in passive and active voices). Kings rule[1436] and protect,[1437] inherit or succeed to,[1438] are entitled to by right of legitimate birth,[1439] assume control of,[1440] attract and enjoy,[1441] get granted, awarded (sometimes with a royal title),[1442] offered[1443] and (illegally or treacherously) deprived of[1444] "(both) land(s) and *thegns*". These qualities indicate a frozen syntax and an exceptionally high level of complementarity in the "land(s) and *thegns*" formula so that it fully matches the classicist John Bryan Hainsworth's (1931–2016)

1433 In *BjarL*, Mannhelgebolk §12, p. 305, appears as *land eða þegna* (lit. land or *thegns*); in *Grípisspá* 4, ON *land/lǫnd* gets replaced with a contextually synonymous and alliteratively neccassary ON *foldu* (dat. sing. of ON *fold*, lit. earth).

1434 „Lengi *skuluð njóta landa ok þegna, er þér fræknan gram falla létuð.*" ("'You brothers [= Gunnar, Hǫgni, and Gothorm] will enjoy your lives and lands a long time, now that you have slain that bold lord of warriors"'; *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 9).

1435 *Bauð hǫlf við sik síðan sonr Óleifs þér* (*hó la frændr, hykk, at þar fyndisk fegnir*) *lǫnd ok þegna* ('Then Óláfr's son [King Magnús inn Góði] offered you [King Haraldr Sigurðarson] half the lands and *thegns* with himself; I think that the kinsmen met there most joyfully'; ÞjóðA *Sex* 10). To avoid anachronisms, I found it possible to slightly alter *SkP*'s translation and retain a literal rendition of the expression under examination.

1436 *BarÞorlSg,* chap 191, p. 178; Anon *Nkt* 61; *Grípisspá* 42; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 10.

1437 *Hervarar Saga*, chap 2, p. 3.

1438 *MaGóHkr*, chap 6, p. 13 (reproducing, if not verbatim, *ÓlHlSer*, chap 262, p. 627 [l. 15; does not occur in all manuscripts]), and chap 65, p. 65; *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, chaps 1, 3, pp. 5, 18 (both versions from AM, MS 291 4° and the *Flateyjarbók*).

1439 *NGulL* §5, p. 309.

1440 *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 1, p. 19 (occurs in the *Flateyjarbók*); Anon *Nkt* 20.

1441 GunnLeif *Merl I* 28; *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 9.

1442 *HákHák*, chap 20, p. 196, and chap 221, p. 48–49; *BjarL*, Mannhelgebolk §12, p. 305, and Rettargangsbolk §152, p. 331 (recycled in *ÞS* §10, p. 263).

1443 ÞjóðA *Sex* 10.

1444 *ÓlTrMest*, II, chap 274, p. 326–327 (occurs in AM, MS 261 fol.); *FrostL*, IV §4, p. 158, and XV §1, p. 254; *BjarL*, Kaupangsbolk §3; *ÞS* §§18, 37, pp. 265, 272; *ÞB*, Mannhelgi §§2, 24, pp. 34, 74–76 – essentially, all legal provisions in this row copy and reproduce each other. All of them qualify such crimes as ON *níðingsverk*, a most shameful, morally condemned, and harshly penalised crime (Love et al. 2020, pp. 252–253 [*s.v.* "niþingsværk/nithingsværk/níðingsverk"]). In legal-political terms, to deprive a king of his "lands and *thegns*" means a high treason.

definition of a literary formula as a 'mutual expectancy of terms'.[1445] In other words, as an object of king's governance "land(s)" are inseparable from "*thegns*" and vice versa.

If we dwell on this formula a little longer and delve deeper, we should discover that it exhibits one of Hainsworth's flexibility types, namely (synonymous) substitution. Apparently, here, ON *þegnar* took the place normally reserved for ON *lýð(i)r* (*cf.* above, p. 239) – a collocation still found in modern Icelandic – or, potentially, ON *láð* (lit. land, predominantely occurs in poetry). The lack of word-initial alliteration between ON *land* and *þegnar* renders the presence of the second element from the start less plausible: rather, it was suited to stand in for ON *lýð(i)r* due to full contextual synonymity. The commonality of ON *land ok lýðr* is hard to gauge: it is entered merely twice in ONP and similarly twice occurs in the *Poetic Edda*.[1446] A full OE cognate *land ond lēod* is known earlier in England.[1447] This is not to say that before us is a loan one or the other way, merely that the alliteration made such coinages possible in both languages, perhaps independent of each other. Either way, the interchangeability of ON *lýð(i)r* and *þegnar* is peculiar to Old Norse. By all accounts, therefore, the synonymity must have been achieved in the first half of the 11th century, and hence this date must further be a good *terminus ante quem* for the meaning "(generic) populace", which accords well with Þjóðólfr's use (above, §4.3.1.2).

In 9 sources (14 elements therein) "land(s) and *thegns*" 23 times form an even longer formula: ON *at sverja* [*einhverjum*] *land/lǫnd ok þegna* (lit. to swear [someone] land[s] and *thegns*). The dat. object in the phrase is always the king. The formula occurs for the first time in *Sverris Saga* and last in Icelandic *Gottskalks Annaler* ("Gottskalk's Annals"),[1448] composed in *c.* 1550×1660 AD; occasionally, the formula drops the second object, ON *ok þegna*.[1449] When matched with relevant contexts, this verbal formula yields a sense that modern editions normally appropriately render in "to take an oath of allegiance". When without a preposition, if ON verb *at sverja* governs the acc. object, the noun normally lies within the semantic spectrum of "fealty" and "assistance" (ON *eið*, lit. oath; *trú*, lit. faith; *félagskapr*, lit. co-operation; *lǫg*, lit. law, etc.). Alternatively, ON *at sverja* can introduce a dependent clause. It may be argued that in the received form this fixed expression under examination is therefore somewhat syntactically aberrant on the grounds of its non-compositional semantics because 'its meaning cannot be derived (except by etymologists) from its individual components'.[1450] We could expect that one could swear to a king to become his *thegn* and (with that?) submit their own land(s) to royal authority, – or something similar. An according situation will be showcased in §4.4.3.4. Though invitably speculative, a tentative conclusion may be that sources preserved and reproduced a fossilised abbreviation of a putatively longer set phrase. That it lingered so long in the corpus supports this conjecture, as does the remarkable immutability the formula enjoys: 'speakers are forced to store the phrase "whole" in the internal lexicon' once the phrase loses its compositional semantics.[1451]

1445 Acker 1998, p. 3.
1446 Kellogg 1988, p. 283 (*s.v.* "lýðr").
1447 In the *Death of King Edward* (l. 25; Dobbie 1942, p. 26) and *Andreas* (l. 1321). In prose, *Ðis land ⁊ þas leodan*, is once recorded in the Peterborough redaction of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*: 1116 AD [MS E]). Other phrases built around the same basic *l*-alliteration include OE *lēodum on lande* (lit. people in the land) in *Beowulf* (l. 2309) and *land and lēodweard* (lit. land and guard of people) in *Genesis A* (l. 1180) and *Exodus* (l. 57).
1448 On the Icelandic annals, see a detailed study by Haug 1997.
1449 E.g., *ÓlTrMest*, II, chap 274, p. 327 (ll. 26–27); *MaSonHkr*, chap 15, p. 256.
1450 Acker 1988, p. 3.
1451 Acker 1988, p. 13.

Finally, two compounds deserve careful attention: ON *þegnskylda* (lit. dues/obligations of a *thegn*) and ON *þegngildi* (lit. a *thegn*'s price). The former appears 19 times in 9 sources (same number of elements), all prose (secular legislation and sagas) and concentrated in the second half of the 13th century. The later enjoyed 42 occurrences in 18 sources and 20 elements therein, also exclusively prose but of a broader genre spectre (secular and ecclesiastic legislation, saga, biblical paraphrase, didactical prose) and longer chronological span (from *Óláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka* in the 1220s to *Henrik Høyors Annaler* in *c.* 1600×1625). Once again, the meanings of both can easily be grasped from rather straightforward contexts and are quite stable.

ON *þegnskylda* can signify two things. One fits best the concept of socio-political allegiance or loyalty towards a superior. Monarchocentric sources do not fail to specify that the king is owed a rightful (ON *rétt*, *lǫglig*) *þegnskylda*,[1452] and that people may find themselves "under" (ON *við* or *í*) *þegnskylda* in respect of a king.[1453] Alternatively, ON *þegnskylda* can mean material dues owed to the king, and contexts imply that they are fixed by both sides and should not be violated.[1454] Noteworthily, in rarer cases the first element *þegn-* may be swapped for *lýð-*[1455] without any apparent loss of meaning or nuance.[1456] It is not entirely clear if *lýð-* in ON *lýðskylda* should be derived from ON *lýðr* or etymologically unrelated ON *hlýðni* (lit. obedience, < ON *hlýða*, lit. to listen, obey).[1457] The former is *par excellence* more likely. As mentioned above, ON *þegnar* can behave as ON *lýð*(*i*)*r*'s synonym. Plus it eliminates a potential pleonasm when ON *þegnskylda* gets occasionally, perhaps with a subtle difference, paired with ON *hlýðni*[1458] which in turn suggests a semantical overlap or expected complimentarity.

ON *þegngildi* is rather synonymous with a concept of *wergild* inasmuch as this fine probably originated as a compensation for homicide.[1459] The initial amount was likely set at forty marks of silver. According to the earliest Norwegian laws to specify this sum, it was payable in full to the king in addition to a status-dependent *wergild* proper; but at least one Swedish law-code trisected the forty marks between the king, bishop, and local community (OSW. *hundari*).[1460] One will be excused to think that the same had occurred elsewhere: *Jyske Lov* glosses *þegngildi* as twelve marks payable to the king in homicide cases settled privately and without oath swearing;[1461] *Jónsbók* set *þegngildi* at thirteen marks, and *Landslov* at thirteen marks and eight *ørtugar* (exactly a third of forty marks), further specifying it as the maximum the king may claim.[1462] The Icelandic annals record under the year 1271 AD that the

1452 *HákHák*, chap 20, p. 196; *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §§2, 12, I, pp. 172, 205–206 (reproduced in *JB*, Um helga trú §2, p. 26).

1453 *BæjrL*, Réttarbœtr, p. 287; *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §8, I, p. 197.

1454 Árna Saga, chap 84, p. 85; *Gizurársáttmáli*, p. 460; *JB*, Um skatt grezalu §1, p. 28.

1455 *HákHák*, chap 20, p. 196: all manuscripts but AM, MS 47 fol. read ON *lýðskylda*, as do all manuscripts but MS Lund, UB Mh 15 in *LL*, Kristendomsbolken, §12, I, p. 206. Conversely, in *JS* §13, p. 264, all manuscripts but AM, MS 346 fol. read ON *þegnskylda*.

1456 Love et al. 2020, pp. 223 (*s.v.* "lýðskylda"), 384 (*s.v.* "þegnskylda").

1457 The initial /h/ before /l/, /r/, /n/ was being lost in continental Nordic languages from the 9th century but retained in Icelandic (Bandle et al. 2002, chap XI:100), though not always present in manuscripts, especially those under Norwegian influence.

1458 *LL*, Kristendomsbolken, §12, I, p. 204; *BæjrL*, Rettarbœtr, p. 287; *JS* §13, p. 264.

1459 On one occasion, it is not entirely clear if homicide was involved: *ÓlHlSer*, chap 220, pp. 564–565 (ll. 11–5; reproduced in *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 222, p. 375). See further: Love et al. 2020, p. 391 (*s.v.* "þiængsgæld/thæghngjald/þegngildi/þingsgæld/þiægnsgæld").

1460 *VmL*, Manhelgdsbalken §11, p. 146; *DalL*, Manhelgdsbalken §1:8, p. 16; *Skuggsjá*, chap 52, p. 40.

1461 *JysL*, Anden bog §13, pp. 162–163.

1462 *JB*, Mannhelgi §1, p. 32; *LL*, Mannhelgebolken §2, I, p. 301. Thirteen-mark *þegngildi* payable to the king

Icelanders "confirmed King Mágnus's entitlement to *þegngildi* from Iceland".[1463] Different versions of the sagas about King Óláfr Haraldsson narrate that when offering terms of submission to the Icelanders, the king demanded that they would owe him *þegngildi*.[1464] Some Norwegian legal texts shorten ON *þegngilgi* to just *þegn*. If the same abbreviation applied in the ON formula *at sverja land/lǫnd ok þegna*, it could explain its otherwise peculiar syntax. On this reading, ON *at sverja þegna* could mean "to pledge *wergilds* to a king", although it still does not illuminate ON *at sverja land/lǫnd*, and given the stock phrase "lands(s) and *thegns*" without ON *at sverja*, allowing for this explanation may be superfluous.

There exists a compelling reason to identify the *þegngildi* as a legal import from England, although establishing its circumstances and accompanying transformations would benefit from further research. Early Anglo-Norman jurists recorded the so-called "murder fine" at the tariff of forty-six marks of silver in cases of stealth killings of foreigners. The texts vacillate on how this sum was raised and divided. But two of the sources unconditionally allocate forty marks to the king and the rest to the kin or lord of the killed, if they have one (if not, the king took it all), or to the murder informant.[1465] Such division matches most closely the similar Old Norse division of a fine for killing into a *þegngildi* and *bætr*.[1466] Modern historical analysis refutes the ascription of the "murder fine" to King William I. Instead, Bruce O'Brien identifies it as an innovation enacted by King Cnut early in his reign but long gone unrecorded until revived by the Normans in similar historical circumstances. Supposedly, the fine was set at forty marks as a notional equivalent of the 1,200-shilling *wergild* (more arithmetically correct, 1,280 shillings, which is 6,400 pence – exactly the number in forty marks), originally expressed in (half)marks of gold as early as the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum (see above, p. 189). The six marks (approximating the standard 200-shilling *wergild*) seem a separate addition, and in the context below,[1467] it probably indeed initially was a compensation to the lord (OE *manbot*) or informant.

The proposed by O'Brien logic of making the king rather than next of kin the recipient of the forty-mark compensation to offer exclusive protection only to King Cnut's Scandinavian followers as legally strangers in England, seems legally impeccable and rooted in established Anglo-Saxon tradition.[1468] But it can be asked if it was wholly novel, because King Æthelred's post-991 AD treaty with Óláfr Tryggvason also followed the Alfred–Guthrum precedent in assigning 1,200-shilling *wergilds* (here expressed as £25) to the free Anglo-Saxons and Danes alike.[1469] As a "sea king", Óláfr led a host of fortune-making raiders rather than conquerors with a view to settling down. Their actual kindred, cut off by the North Sea, had even fewer prospects of being reimbursed. Conjecturally, just as King William followed in King Cnut's footsteps, so could Cnut have breathed a new life into a short-lived praxis from the previous reign.

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are the only recorded sum in the citations entered in ONP (*s.v.* "þegngildi").

1463 *…iatat konvngi þegngilldi á Islanndi* (*Annales Regii*, *s.a.* 1271 AD), reproduced in *Lögmanns-Annáll*, *s.a.* 1269/1270 AD.

1464 *ÓlHlSer*, chap 125, p. 370 (ll. 4–7; reproduced in *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 136, p. 241).

1465 Wl art 3:1, p. 487; Leis Wl 22, p. 511; Hn 13:2, 75:6a, 91:1, pp. 116, 234, 284–286; ECf 15–16, pp. 172–174.

1466 *LL*, Mannhelgebolken §12, I, pp. 364–366; *BæjrL*, Mandhelgebolk §15, p. 219; *ƷB*, Mannhelgi §§1, 14, pp. 32, 56; *ƷS* §42, p. 273; ONP (*s.v.* "þegn ok bøtr").

1467 O'Brien 1996.

1468 Ine 23, p. 98; Af 28, p. 66; EGu 12, p. 134; VIII Atr 33, p. 267 (reproduced in II Cn 40, p. 340).

1469 *Gyf Ænglisc man Denisċne ofsleo, frigman frigne, gylde hine mid xxv pundum, oððon man ðone handdædan agyfe; ⁊ do se Denisca ðone Engliscan ealswa, gif hine ofslea* ('If an Englishman slays a Dane, both being free men, he shall pay 25 pounds for him, or the actual delinquent shall be delivered up. And likewise in the case of a Dane who slays an Englishman'; II Atr 5, p. 222).

Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* seems to indicate that this praxis also attracted the presently discussed legal name later known in Scandinavia. The prelate conjured up an exemplary situation illustrative of surrounding decadence: a run-away *thrall* joins viking marauders and kills his former master and a *thegn* without retribution to his family; but if the master kills his *thrall*-turned-viking, he pays a *þegngield*, though to whom went unelaborated upon.[1470] Both Old English treaties with the Scandinavians stipulated against receiving fugitive slaves,[1471] so the fact was probably common enough to inform Wulfstan's rhetoric. It also implies payment by the lord and matches the conclusion that the responsibility to raise forty marks was originally laid on Anglo-Saxon lords in the first place.[1472] It remains unclear, though, on which coast of the North Sea the "*thegn*'s price" was coined first. Both compound elements were productive in Old Norse and Old English, but as regard the latter, OE *þegngield* is a *hapax legomenon*. Wulfstan could have coined it *ad hoc* just like he had coined the new compounds OE *þegenwer* and *þegenriht*.[1473] The sermon was likely preached to England's political establishment gathered in York in February 1014 AD, therefore plausibly including a good number of the "Danelaw" magnates.[1474] As he probably took into account his audience's *Erfahrungsraum*, OE *þegngield* could have had pre-existed before this gathering outside classical West Saxon. Perhaps, OE *þegngield* spread as a re-thinking by the Danish elite audience of the Alfred–Guthrum treaty. They probably claimed eight halfmarks of gold assigned to them (arguably) on a par with the West Saxon "king's *thegns*" (if the conjecture above, p. 189, is correct) but to such Danes, the qualification "king's" did not resonate as it did with the Anglo-Saxons. If that were the case, then perhaps ON *þegngildi* inspired Wulfstan's OE *þegenwer* and *þegenriht* rather than the other way around.

It is at this stage difficult to pinpoint the ultimate origin of ON *þegngildi* and OE *þegngield*. In any case, that it appeared – at least once – in the "Danelaw" context alongside another stable Old Norse formula by Wulfstan, *thegn* and *thrall*, adds arguments to the need to treat *thegns* as a transregional phenomenon. It also provides additional substance for answering research QUESTION 3 in §5.3 on what this phenomenon can say about the late Viking Age in a pan-North-Sea perspective.

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Senses of ON *þegn* tied in with kingship take up a large portion of the registered entries. The chronological and textual variety confirm that such semantics was hardly accidental or occasional. Karl Martin Nielsen's passing over it must originate in his rejection of Svend Aakjær's theses that hinged upon a presupposed complementarity of *thegns* and monarchy. To be true to the methodological principles formulated in §1.7.2, these senses are not

1470 *Ðeah þræla hwilc hlaforde ætleape ⁊ of cristendome to wicinge wurðe, ⁊ hit æfter þam eft gewurðe þæt wæpengewrixl wurðe gemæne þegne ⁊ þræle, gif þræl þone þegen fullice afille, licge ægilde ealre his mægðe; and gif se þegen þone þræl þe he ær ahte fullice afille, gilde þegengilde* ('Though any slave runs away from his master and, deserting Christianity, becomes a viking, and after that it comes about that a conflict takes place between thegn and slave, if the slave slays the thegn, no wergild is paid to any of his kindred; but if the thegn slays the slave whom he owned before, he shall pay the price of a thegn'; *Sermo Lupi*, ll. 96–103; the version from the CCCC MS 201).

1471 AGu 5, p. 128; II Atr 6:2, p. 224.

1472 O'Brien 1996, pp. 338–339, 349.

1473 V Atr 9:1, p. 24 (reproduced in VI Atr 5:3, p. 248). See also Pons-San 2013, pp. 459–460. Charles Carr's cited opinion about the independent formation of the two fully identical compounds in Old English and Old Norse may be an alternative solution, if doubtful.

1474 Wilcox 2004, pp. 380–383.

arbitrary: they are always contextually and/or syntactically motivated. At the same time what catches the eye is the stability present in ON *þegn* and its compounds when loaded with the semantics of being part of a subordinate relationship with kings. This staticism shines through the oft-recycled formulaic use, perhaps including, as surmised above, even fossilised forms. With due caution, for the lexicographical purposes of this chapter, we may assume that the senses present in ON *þegn*, at least when it connoted a king's liegeman or subject, preceded in their oral circulation the time when Old Norse literary tradition was being commissioned to writing.

4.3.3 ON Þegn*'s Miscellaneous Meanings*

A smaller percentage of cases of ON *þegn* do not conform to the semantic fields proposed in §§4.3.1 and 4.3.2. Some are *hapax legomena*, others marginally rare. For a complete picture, they will be grouped and briefly discussed in the section below.

4.3.3.1 Lord/God's (earthly) servant; demon

"Servant" in a generic sense, so ubiquitous in Anglo-Saxon England, seems to be almost completely alien to ON *þegn*. But 4 isolated attestations in the extant corpus prove that ON *þegn* can mean "man of God" or "Lord's follower", and in one entry ON *þegn* connotes a demon (lit. servant of Satan). I have been able to distinguish these meanings merely in 5 sources (the same number of elements), 2 of which are skaldic poetry (secular and religious), and the rest are visionary genre, biblical paraphrase, and prose hagiography.

There is a strong reason to suspect English influence in all such cases. In three, the syntax and lexical choice directly mirrors that which is prevalent in Old English: King Óláfr is poetically declared by Einarr Skúlason "Christ's *thegn*",[1475] St Eustace (Placidus) twice gets called "God's *thegn*" (*cf.* above, §3.3.4).[1476] One that calls the prophet Daniel "God's friend and his best *thegn*",[1477] as observed by Jón Helgason, was either a direct recycling of or at least exhibited familiarity with Ælfric's sermon *De Falsis Diis*[1478] ("On False Gods").[1479] *Duggals Leizla* uses ON *englar myrkrar er menn kalla djófla ok þegna fjándans* ('angels of darkness which men call devils and servants of the fiend') to translate LAT. *angeli sunt*

1475 *Þreklynds skulu Þrændir þegns prýðibrag hlýða Krists — lifir hann í hæstri høll — ok Norðmenn allir* ('The Þrœndir and all Norwegians should listen to the splendid poem of the strong-minded thane of Christ [= Óláfr]; he lives in the highest hall. Energetic fame has become renowned in this king's realm; neither people nor such a prince will be born [again]'; Esk *Geisl* 11 – note, however, Martin Chase's textual comments to this stanza, specifically his justification of reading *þegns prýðibrag*, 'splendid poem of the thane', instead of *þegnprýðis brag*, 'poem of the thane-ornamenter').

1476 *Ógn stóð angrs af hegni; ulfgæðendr þá flæðu; þegn hlaut goðs fyr gagni — guðr háðisk vel —ráða* ('Menace issued from the suppressor of sin [HOLY MAN]; the wolf-feeders [WARRIORS] fled then; God's retainer [HOLY MAN] was able to gain the victory; the battle was fought well'; Anon *Pl* 47) and *Herferðar rak harðan hyr-Þróttr í styr flótta odda þings ok eyddi eirlaust heruð þeira, áðr fyr rán, þats réðu randlinns stafar vinna, gjald, sem goðs þegn vildi, gjalfrhests metendr festu* ({The Þróttr <= Óðinn> {of the fire {of the assembly of spears}}} [(lit. 'fire-Þróttr of the assembly of spears') BATTLE > SWORD > WARRIOR] vigorously pursued the retreat of the troops in battle and mercilessly harried their districts, until {the appraisers {of the sea-stallion}} [SHIP > SEAFARERS] fixed such compensation as {God's retainer} [HOLY MAN] wished for the pillaging, which {the staves {of the shield-serpent}} [SWORD > WARRIORS] had committed'; Anon *Pl* 48).

1477 *A þuí lande hínu sama var sa propheti er het Daníel guðs vínr oc hans hinn besti þegn. Oc heilagr maðr sua at hann melti við varn drottenn þegar er hann villdi* ("In that same land there was a prophet named Daniel, God's friend and his best servant, a holy man so that he spoke with the Lord whenever he wished"; *Heimslýsing ok Helgifræði*, chap 6, p. 161).

1478 *SH* II:21.

1479 Helgason 1960, p. xii.

tenebrarum et ministri Sathane[1480] – the equivalence between *þegn* and *minister* strongly recalls the Old English use (above, p. 97).

4.3.3.2 (**non-royal**) **liegeman**

At least 9 sources and the same number of elements, with a total of 14 times, deploy the meaning "liegeman" separately from kingship. The poetry–prose division is almost equal (6 to 4, accordingly); genres include *konunga sǫgur*, chivalric poetry (Swedish *Konung Alexander*), and skaldic poetry. In terms of chronology, the lower limit may cut through the 10th century, because even if Christopher Sapp errs in his dating of the Eddic *Oddrúnargrátr* ("The Weeping of Oddrún"), the sense was familiar to Egill Skallagrímson who employed it in one of his *lausavísur*.[1481] *Konung Alexander*, dated to 1375×1386 AD, sets the upper chronological boundary. Beside the context alone, an important identifying feature for this meaning was *genetivus possessivus* that featured on all occasions.

Though four sagas six times feature the generic sense "liegeman", only three are unique. The episode in which the pirate chieftain Búi commands his *thegns* (variant reading of ON *lið* in other manuscripts) to abandon a captured ship amidst a battle circulated verbatim in three versions of the sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason (above, n. 1383). The other two occurrences are also highly suggestive. One can be found in a story about a battle of the Byzantine Emperor John II Komnenos against the Pazinaks in 1122 AD. The emperor's army included a contingent of Scandinavian mercenaries (the *væringjar*), whose leader, a Swede from Helsingjaland by the name of Þórir, remarked to the emperor that he and his men were prepared to dash into enemy ranks, even if outnumbered. The episode is narrated in *Óláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka* and slightly later in *Heimskringla*. The two versions are identical save a *varia lectio* of the noun: the former saga calls Þórir's troop his *lið*, the latter his *þegnar*.[1482] The final time we meet a seemingly generic *thegnly* "liegeman" in prose resists an unambiguous lexical compartmentalisation. The late *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta* adds details to the narrative of King Óláfr's confrontation with a chieftain Járn-Skeggi in course of the king's Christian proselytism (examined at greater length below, pp. 316–317). Skeggi tricked him into taking the reins of the chariot of the god Þórr's idol and declared the king to have become Þórr's *thegn* and servant (ON *þegn ok þjónstumaðr*) and shown the god obedience (ON *hlýðni*), which eventually leads to Skeggi's execution.[1483] On hand is the same expression that describes kings' liegemen and moreover, the subaltern is a divine being (*cf.* above, n. 1481). But because he's a pagan god, it was decided to group this episode with other fragments in the current section.

As regards the poetic use of ON *þegn* for the meaning "liegeman", the unifying feature is that it is likely hyponymic, as hardly anything somehow highlights the *thegns* in these poetic contexts. The transformation of Búi and Þórir's troops into their *thegns* in some manuscripts

1480 *Duggals Leizla*, pp. 77–78 (ll. 12–13).

1481 Egill Lv 6. On balance, a discussion of this instance and the elucidated meaning may be in order, for Egill on this occasion spoke of the god Óðinn's *thegn*, and given the association between this deity and kingship, this *lausavísa* may also be categorised with other specimens in §4.3.2.1.

1482 *Þótt þar væri fyrir eldr brennandi, þá mynda ek ok mínir liðar þegar í hiaupa, er ek vissa, at þat keyptisk í, at þér, konungr, hefðið þá frið eptir* ('Though we were faced by raging fire, yet I and my troops would leap straight in if I knew that the result would be that you, king, would have peace thereafter'; *HákHerHkr*, chap 21, pp. 371–372; *ÓlHlSer*, chap 267, p. 634 [l. 11], reads an exact same sentence except the *vario lectio* between ON *lið* and *þegnar*).

1483 *ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 168, pp. 379–380.

may be reasonably explained as a likely spill-over effect of the skaldic language most commonly applicable to *comitatus* environments and the according array of synonyms for men of a *comitatus*.

4.3.3.3 *búþegn*

ON *búþegn* has already appeared above in §§4.3.1.2 and 4.3.1.5. Contrary to the proliferation of Old English compounds featuring OE *þegn* as the second element, ON *búþegn* so far seems the only of its kind in Old Norse. Little can be added. ON *bú* means 'household; the productive enterprise' that

> [...] included the livestock, the place, the enterprise, and the juridical unit,[1484]

– and is linguistically related to ON *býr* (on it, see above, §2.3.2.2), both of which in turn relate to ON *búa* (see above, p. 17). As transpires from the lexical designation of Þórsteinn Þóruson's land inheritance as his *bú* (below, p. 298), and in full accordance with Bjørn Poulsen's prompt of the lexical merger of all free strata under the cap ON *bændr*, Viking-Age elites could have probably passed as *búþegnar* as long as they owned *bú*.

Contextually, the compound reveals no features that would somehow nuance it in comparison with the monolexical ON *þegn* – as in, for instance, the negative moral characteristics given to the "little *búþegn*" Þórgrímr (above, p. 249). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the characteristics of hosts: one Ǫlvir in Gautland, because he accepted the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson with companions after three of his namesakes had driven them away, is called the "best *thegn*";[1485] but Bjǫrn Eitrkveisa who too refused lodging to the fleeing mother of Óláfr Tryggvason is pejoratively branded "the worst *búþegn*"[1486] by one author and "a bad *thegn*" by another.[1487] In view of this doublet redundancy, the very existence of ON *búþegn* may owe to the alliterative potential offered by the first element, *bú-*. Indeed, except the "good-*thegn*" contexts (above, §4.3.1.5), ON *búþegn* occurs almost exclusively as a pair to ON *bændr* in kings' formal addresses in sagas and legal amendments.[1488] With the well-confirmed meaning "king's subject" present in ON *þegn*, it would make absolute sense for Norwegian monarchs to verbally call the addressees *thegns* in a top-down manner, and the first element *bú-* allowed it metrically. Therefore, apparently and despite ON *þegn* and *maðr*'s permissible interchangeability, ON *búþegn* did not necessarily have to be coined as a variation of ON *búmaðr* (lit. farmer), but plausibly only out of mnemonic alliterative need. ON *búþegn* retained the second element's full semantics with little to no effect from the first element.

4.3.3.4 Christian meanings

Unlike Old English, where OE *þegn* proliferated in religious contexts, its Old Norse cognate saw only rare – with one exception – poetic use in similar senses. In four skaldic stanzas, of them one from the second half of the 12th century and the rest from late 13th – early 14th century, ON *þegn* is used by poets to mean "a Christian".[1489] The anonymous *Pétrsdrápa*

1484 Miller 1990, p. 115.
1485 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 91, p. 138 (recycled in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 75, p. 201 [l. 6]).
1486 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 3, p. 227.
1487 *ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 44, p. 71, version of AM, MS 61 fol.
1488 E.g., King Hákon Hákonarson's legal amendments of 1202 or 1203, 1226×1256, and 6 June 1263 AD (nos. 4, 7, 13 in *NGL* I, pp. 444, 448, 462), in addition to nn. 1320 and 1337, above.
1489 Anon *Leið* 15 and 33; Anon *Líkn* 29; Anon *Gyð* 5; Anon *Mdr* 22.

("*Drápa* about the Apostle Peter") thrice calls its main character, the apostle, a *thegn*.[1490] The only prose exception and specimen of hagiography, *Marteins Saga Biskups II* ("The II Saga of Bishop Martin"), puts into the mouth of St Martin the commitment of his monks, here called *thegns*, to God's custody after his retirement.[1491] Since this use of ON *þegn* may be unique, it is not unreasonable to concede that it was a direct borrowing or look-back at Old English where OE *þegn* had earlier seen such application.[1492]

Vignette 4. *Reksthegn:* An Idiosyncratic Legal Occasionalism

Frostuþingslǫg features a, what appears to be, occasionalism, or nonce word (i.e. a lexeme coined for a specific occasion and not recognised as a standard unit in the vocabulary of a given language): ON *rekspegn*. It is understandable in context but resists further elucidation. Besides six entries in *Frostuþingslǫg*, ON *rekspegn* also once occurs in *Bjarkeyar Réttr* (lit. "Birch Isle Law": to exactly which of the many like-named Scandinavian islands the name originally referred is problematic to say, but some believe it to be Birka) that applied in Niðaróss (later called Þrándheimr), but this was no doubt a leak from *Frostuþingslǫg*. In both laws, a *reksthegn* appears as a legal rank defined by owed fines in relation to other ranks, first of all *hǫldr* (see §§4.4.2.2–3), *árborinn maðr* (a free-born), and freed people and/or their offspring. In this hierarchy, *reksthegn* stood second to the last, and the fine rates normally related to each other as 1–¾–½– (Table 6). Longer rows of ranks and those with freed people's (grand)children may indicate younger clauses, in some cases probably datable: thus, *FrostL*, XIII §15 must postdate 1152/1153 AD when the archbishopric of Niðaróss was first established.

Little is clear about the identity of these *reksthegns*. All that can be said with certainty is that, in the recorded spelling, to explain the linking *-s-*, the first element in the compound ought to be a gen. sing. of a strong *a-* or *i*-stem masculine or a strong *a*-stem neuter noun. The first candidate is ON *ríki* (lit. realm, dominion), and Norwegian manuscripts often spell *e* for classical Old Norse *i/í*. But ON **rík*(*i*)*spegn* would hardly satisfy the search for a meaning, for who such low-valued "*thegns* of the realm" could have been receives no good explanation. The other candidate is ON *rekkr*. The proposed meaning would then be "a *thegn* of a *rekkr*", in this case of some sort of a military lord in someone else's service.[1493] Besides morphology, this sense has been proposed with resort to toponymical reasoning from *Rinkeby* place names. This version is deficient inasmuch as no known Scandinavian legal rank passed under ON *rekkr*; as the word itself is a rarity in prose (although it occurs in an alliterative formula in *Frostuþingslǫg*); and, as argued in §2.3.2.2, as *Rinkebys* do not have to belong here to start with. The most plausible explanation was proposed by Ebbe Hertzberg who derived the *reks-* element from ON (**v*)*reka* (lit. to drive, chase away, pursue).[1494] In this, case *reks* is a gen. sing. of neuter abstract nominalisation of a verb, either directly or through the mediation of ON *rekstr* (lit. driving, chasing; retained in dialectal NORW. *rekst*[*er*], lit. livestock trail). Either way, Hertzberg envisaged the meaning "unsettled, vagabond *thegn*" and set it in opposition to ON *búþegn* (*cf.* above, §4.3.3.3).[1495] In this line of thinking, the lower legal protection and liability proceeded from a less established social position but still above people of former slave status in a community's living memory. It has been suggested that because *reksthegns* ranked between the freed and the free-born, and because the latter were likely the freed in the fifth generation or more (below, p. 283), *reksthegns* could have corresponded to the freed before the lapse of four generations.

1490 Anon *Pét* 25, 29, and 47.

1491 *MarSgBisk* II, chap 53, p. 602.

1492 Old English religious literature and its dissemination in the Old Norse–Icelandic textual community has been studied by, e.g., Abram 2007; Gade 2007.

1493 This interpretation was upheld by, e.g., Maurer 1890 and Hans Kuhn 1944, p. 115.

1494 The word-initial /v/ (< PGMC /*w/) was lost in the transition to Old West Norse but retained in Old East Norse and West Germanic languages (Bandle et al. 2002, chap IX:81, p. 716), hence such cognates as MODE *wreak*, DAN. *vrage*, SW. *vräka* and others, all eventually derived from PGMC **wrekan* (Kroonen 2013, p. 595 [*s.v.* "*wrekan"]).

1495 Hertzberg 1889, pp. 225–227; 1890, pp. 266–270.

Clause	*FrostL*, IV §49, p. 172	*FrostL*, IV §53, p. 173	*FrostL*, X §35, p. 225	*FrostL*, X §41, p. 227	*FrostL*, X §46, p. 228	*FrostL*, XIII §15, p. 244
Offence	malicious injury of	injury by	verbal insult of*	stealing horse from	maiming horse of	trespassing on land of
king	–	576 *aurar*	–	–	–	24 *aurar*
archbishop, abbot/-ess	–	–	–	–	–	20 *aurar*
jarl	–	288 *aurar*	–	–	–	16 *aurar***
lendr maðr	–	144 *aurar*	–	–	–	9 *aurar*
hǫldr	6 *aurar*	72 *aurar*	24 *aurar*	6 *aurar*	6 *aurar*	6 *aurar*
árborinn maðr	4 *aurar*	48 *aurar*	16 *aurar*	4 *aurar*	4 *aurar*	4 *aurar*
reksþegn	3 *aurar*	36 *aurar*	12 *aurar*	3 *aurar*	3 *aurar*	3 *aurar*
freed slave's son	–	–	8 *aurar****	–	2 *aurar*	2 *aurar*
freed slave	2 *aurar*	24 *aurar*	6 or 4 *aurar*	2 *aurar*	1 *aurar*	1 *aurar*

Table 6. Legal ranks in *Frostuþingslǫg*. All fines converted into *aurar* for convenience's sake, according to the law-code's internal conversion rates. *FrostL*, X §35 (*) is repeated verbatim in *BæjrL* III, §162, p. 333; XIII §15 (**) assigns a 16-*eyrir* fine to protect bishops in addition to jarls; X §35 (***) speaks of grandson rather than son of a freed slave

While not implausible linguistically, Hertzberg's variant still hangs in a certain social vacuum. ON *búþegn* was not used a social/legal rank either, is rather infrequent in the corpus, and, as argued, probably owed its very existence to its alliterative qualities. Further, a "vagabond *thegn*" sits at odds with the notion of his enclosure protected by a three-*eyrir* fine against trespassing (ON *landnám*;[1496] see Table 6, rightmost column). Andreas Holmsen (1906–1989) suggested that *reksthegns* were "the dependent petty tenants at the *setr gárðar* from the 8th–9th centuries".[1497] On exactly what his guess relied remained unelaborated upon. Halvard Bjørkvik (1924–2021) and colleagues pondered whether *reksthegns* could have been the nomadic Sámi engaged in reindeer-raising.[1498] This would explain their presence only in the Frostuthing law-province, where contacts were likely to take place.[1499] But this supposition leaves unanswered why (and when) the Sámi got to be called this nonce term, especially given the predominance of a by far much more common name, ON *finnar*, and once again, how this fits the protection against trespassing in an obviously sedentary context.

With so little to go about, the matter of the *reksthegn* occasionalism will be put to the side in the remainder of the book as it is currently insoluble.

4.3.4 Summary and Implications for Ensuing Research

The first half of Chapter 4 methodologically corresponds to the *first stage* of research in respect of the Old Norse material. Of research questions, by examining the lexicographical problemata surrounding ON *þegn* it specifically addressed Question 1. The analysis above will benefit from a synthesis and emphasis on the most important findings that yield the answer to the just mentioned research question.

At first glance, ON *þegn* possesses a wide semantical range, in this study compartmentalised in 12 discrete meanings. On closer inspection, however, most of all occurrences of ON *þegn* pronouncedly cluster in two groups: senses associated with kingship and attendant subjection to it; and those latched onto notions of social freedom and its various valuable concomitants. Unlike the Old English corpus, in which OE *þegn* appears with a single

1496 Iversen and Myking 2019, pp. 37, 54 (n. 18).
1497 '...de avhengige småbrukerne på setrgårdene fra 8.–9. århundre' (Holmsen 1961, p. 183).
1498 KLNM XIV, pp. 35–37 (*s.v.* "Rekstegn").
1499 See, e.g., Zachrisson 1994a; 2008; Valtonen 2007.

semantical core (servant), ON *þegn* thus offers a dramatically different dual one that has little to do with notions of (respectable) service. Some of ON *þegn*'s remaining registered but sundry meanings appear derivative and subsidiary. Meanings such as "warrior" and "(generic) liegeman" must be cases of contextual hyponymy with the supertype ON *maðr* and not self-sufficient. Unless a deliberate antonym to the nonce ON *rekspegn*, ON *búþegn* does not clearly demonstrate an apparent separate and unique semantic force at all. Other remaining meanings reveal unmistakable traces of Old English straightforward inspiration or influence. This certainly applies when ON *þegn* stands to mean a servant of a supernatural being and, potentially, adherents of Christianity. ON *þegn ok þjón*(*stumaðr*) is probably best explained as a direct calque of OE *þegnas ond þeōwas*. Besides that ON *þjónn* is a full cognate of OE *þeōw*, the expression always occurs in religious literature, well-known for its familiarity with an Anglo-Saxon elder cousin, excepting *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta*. In the latter case, however, it is again in a religious context. ON *þegngildi* – both the word and a forty-mark fine to the king – almost certainly originated in England as well. Whether or not the Old Norse sense "king's liegeman" belongs here too can be debated, although, as CHAPTER 5 will show, such possibility should not be discarded. Notably, there at the same time transpire some apparent differences from the Old English lexical, though less so semantical, specifics. Conceptually, Old English "good *thegns*" are first and foremost of an element of social hierarchy. Contextually, Old Norse "good *thegns*" definitely exhibit socially-commended, aristocratic even behaviour, but are lexically first of all a conceptual embodiment of certain moral qualities, derived from such habitus. These minor differences, however, are not incompatible or contradictory.

Of further note is the observed abundance of numerous and comparatively conservative formulaic prose secular uses of ON *þegn*, which again set them quite apart from Old English where OE *þegn* figures in fixed expressions seemingly only in conservative poetic Christian kennings. This occurs at a linguistic stage when Old Norse had existed for a few centuries but was for the first time subjected to recording that surpassed previous runic texts in length, information, and variability. Hence it would not stretch the available evidence to opine that these uses must predate the time of actual textual records. In other words, when Old Norse got drawn into the orbit of the European-style literary tradition, it fixed ON *þegn*'s semantics in an already fully developed form that, so much as follows from the analysis above, did not undergo any considerable evolution in the written period.

To the extent that ON *þegn* can conceptually overlap with ON *bóndi*'s narrower and particular socio-political applications within its broader semantics, a Scandinavian *thegn*, regardless of his material status, now appears a free and legally empowered member of the *lýð*(*i*)*r*, *þjóð*, or *landsfolk*, and now a contributor to the body politic topped by the *høfðingjar*, *landstjórnarmenn* et al. Though formulated decades ago, Ebbe Hertzberg's definition of ON *þegn* in §2.3.1.1 – "a free and independent practitioner of all rights of a person fully vested with liberties" – thus still holds, at least in respect of Old Norse–Icelandic medieval texts. A Scandinavian *thegn*, so long as he on other occasions appears as a *bóndi*, let alone *høldr*, certainly dominates lower tiers of the Scandinavian social landscape – the *alþýða*, *múgr*, *verkalýðr*, and *thralls*. Certain features – such as extracting labour from dependants and involvement in governance (leastwise locally) – allow to position a Scandinavian *thegn* at the intersection between the elite and (lay) aristocracy on the Venn diagram in the conceptual map of this book (Figure 1). An important qualification is required, though:

compared to steeper social pyramids elsewhere, his social aristocratism is only relative to inferior social categories and is strongly tied to political engagement, in which a Scandinavian *thegn* is all the same less a *pro*-active subject and more an entitled but still *re*active object. *Thegns* are actively invited to lend legitimacy to a political event through acclamation (thus becoming a collective political actor) or summoned to bear the burden of war (thus probably, benefiting from its spoils). But it is not they who formulate the political agenda, initiate an offensive military campaign (although they can rebel), or are a king's first line of governing personnel. In *Rígsþula*'s layout, all that is the prerogative of jarls; in *Konungs Skuggsjá*'s, it is vested in (*lands*)*hǫfðingjar*, *lendir menn*, knights, and (professional?) warriors. Accordingly, from a sovereign's perspective, *thegns* are the social entity towards which his political power gets applied. In the end, *thegns* appear a social elite as far as they were capable of representing the whole community without a mandate by royal power. In turn, kingship, represented by a monarch and people in his employ, appears a steering superstructure in a society made of such communities led by local *thegns*.

In these respects, the interpretation of runic *thegns* as kings' agents ("camp vassalage") is *prima facie* not sustainable. Karl Martin Nielsen's claim that,

> [a]s far as *thegns* are concerned, it can with relative certainty be said that they did not perform service in a [royal] retinue,[1500]

– certainly fits *Hirðskrá*'s ("The Code of the Court"; *c.* 1270 AD) opposition of the king's liegemen (ON *handgengnir/konungs menn*) to his *thegns*.[1501] But ca. a third of ON *þegn*'s singled out entries in the corpus, including the conservative skaldic verse, corroborates the top-down and (notionally) asymmetrical possessive relationships between a king and a *thegn* nonetheless. Not long before the composition of *Hirðskrá*, King Hákon Hákonarson lamented that during the so-called "civil wars", 'we [= the king] have lost our best *thegns* in the country'.[1502] His son King Magnús Hákonarson expected a select body of the *bœndr* from every *fylki* to personally swear to the king on behalf of 'all those who owe *þegnskylda* to the king [...] who wish to benefit from his oath' to be 'loyal and faithful' 'as a good *thegn* must give all lawful *þegnskylda* to a good king'.[1503] The legislator emphasises that this selected body's oath was binding for those they represented but who stayed home. These principles seem to have been already exploited at the *konungstekja* at Eyra (present-day Øra in Trøndelag) in 1177 AD by King Sverrir, who, according to his biographical saga, was then elected and "sworn lands and *thegns*" by twelve representatives from each *fylki* in Þrœndaló̧g.[1504]

In accordance with the methodology in §1.7.2.3 and to explain this semantic duality of a *thegn*, in the second part of the chapter this study will now attempt to approximately flesh out the social character of the people who on various occasions were referred to as *thegns* in Scandinavia in the "second Viking Age".

1500 'For thegnernes vedkommende kan det med tilnærmelsesvis sikkerhed siges, at de ikke har gjort tjeneste i hirden' (Nielsen 1945, p. 121).

1501 *Hirðskrá* §§15 (20), 29 (34), 35 (40), pp. 91–92, 126, 148.

1502 *…ver mist hinna beztu þegna várra í landinu* (*FrostL*, II §8, p. 123). Larson's addition '[some of]' is not corroborated by manuscript readings.

1503 *…ek skal vera hollr ok trur mínum herra. Nomini. noregs konungr* […] *suo sem* [*goðr þægn skal goðom konunge veita alla loglega lyðskyldu* (LundUB, MS Mh 15 reads *þegnskyldu*) *Abyrgi er mer þenna eið ok ollum þeim ikonungssens þægnskylldu ero* [*allner* […] *hans eiðs eigu at níota* (*LL*, Kristendomsbolken, §12, I, pp. 204–207). I allowed myself to swap Friðriksdóttir's 'subject' for "*thegn*" and 'allegiance' for "*þegnskylda*".

1504 *Sverris Saga*, chap 16, p. 27.

4.4 The Scandinavian *Thegn*

In the pursued three-stage research methodology (above, §1.7.1), the sub-chapter below corresponds to the *second stage*. Of research questions, it specifically addresses Question 2 and strives to give a structural delineation of the social category(-ies) that Scandinavian *thegns* likely were part of, with a focus on the *thegns*' societal features listed at the end of the following paragraph.

Upfront must be set the scope of the enquiry that follows. First, it is inevitably conditioned by the narrative type of the available sources and lack of any documentary coverage for the Viking Age. Sagas are comparatively loose in their vocabulary of the Viking-Age powers-that-be, nor will they yield the exact numbers of social actors they pertain to. Instead, most of the narrative space is normally saved for the persons interacting with kingship, especially those from the uppermost social strata. Texts typically mention them individually and, at best, add "and many others". Consecutively, it is probably unknowable from where and how many members of the elite one or several steps below got no recording at all as irrelevant in the dynastic saga history. Second, sagas will not methodically provide quantifiable data on, for example, these actors' material wealth and its geographic distribution or origins. Sagas often confine them to impressionistic statements, such as "a very well-to-do man", "a most prominent person there-and-there", and the like. This is why the conclusions below will be interpreted best as first and foremost pertinent to the topper social crusts and applicable to broader elites only as a matter of projection. With the thus skewed source base, of the listed research sub-questions, the extrapolations below will only qualitatively address, first, *thegns* as legal actors, virtually left to the side in the "Aakjærian" and "Nielsenist" contributions; then proceed to *thegns* as landed proprietors and subsequently tie the socio-legal and property matters together, as do the available sources themselves; and finally, look at the interactive dynamics between these actors and kingship.

These examinations, however, must throughout look back at the caveat that the extent of conjecture-free exploration is more limited than in England. The composition of the available corpus (above, §4.2.1) dictates that conclusions will proceed chiefly from the Norwegian case as the one best recorded in vernacular sources. Yet, if lexical incident can be trusted, the studied phenomena (for instance, the *hǫldar* and *hersar*; below, §4.4.2.3) might have existed more widely, even if not identically, in the Norse-speaking ecumene. As well as in Northumbria, where Norwegian presence is undeniable, the *hǫldar* are mentioned in "Danish Mercia" (see Map 3), which is not suspected of a specifically Norwegian influence. It has also been speculated, though not definitively proved or debunked, that ON *hǫldr* could have left a trace in Danish place names.[1505] The same may have applied to ON *hersir* that, some scholars have similarly contented from toponymic reconstructions, was known in Svíþjóð.[1506] Reservations about the servicability of place names in such connexions have been expressed above (§2.3.2.2), but OSW. *Hærsir* is also once recorded in the Swedish north as a personal name in runic inscriptions,[1507] and also as an apparent appellative in

1505 As in Danish *Hal*(*l*)-, *Hol*(*l*)-, *Hold*- place names (Hald 1933, – although note the author's reservations).

1506 As in Swedish *Härs*- place names (Christiansen 2002, p. 75 [map 2]), proponed first and foremost by the Swedish toponymist Lars Hellberg (1914–2006) back in the 1970s: see Hellberg 2013, pp. 10–11 (a reproduction of his previously unpublished 1975 paper); 1978, p. 70; 1979, pp. 147–148, 160. The argument has been accepted by, e.g., Franzén 1982, p. 20, and later by Stefan Brink.

1507 Peterson 2007, p. 131. The inscription in question is M 9† (in present-day Västernorrlands län, but Hälsing-

one Södermanlandic inscription.[1508] At any rate, these data suggest that the word circulated outside Norway, which has implications paralleled in how the personal name Þegn also occurs in Swedish runic inscriptions.[1509] That ON *lendr maðr* (= OSW. *lændær maþer*) once found its way into the elder *Västgötalagen*[1510] cannot in itself be taken as proof that the exact same relationship of interpersonal subordination, originally imbued in this expression in Norway, (had) existed in Vestrgautland. But some Icelandic sources used ON *lendr maðr* as a seemingly generic term for any chieftain in Norway (below, n. 1739). It has been contended that ON *landmaðr* (not to be confused with modern DAN. *landmand*, lit. farmer), found on one Södermanlandic and two Danish stones,[1511] may have been its earlier doublet in runic inscriptions that

> [...] give[ ] no reasons to believe that one ought to have been someone's *landmaðr*; it should instead be a designation of a person who (in this respect) was not in a dependent position.[1512]

One might therefore suppose an existence of local lords here and elsewhere on a par with a similar Norwegian social category that appropriately allowed for this Norwegianism in a Gautlandic context, especially given the known Norwegian connexions of *Västgötalagen*'s likely commissioner Áskell Magnússon (above, n. 1329). On top of all that, that the *dróttkvætt* meter, otherwise preserved in Old Norse–Icelandic context, is first recorded on Öland, must speak to a wider spread of Viking-Age skaldic poetry, in which ON *þegn* abounds.

The paragraph above invites us to treat any made observations as an approximative and feature-oriented rather than number-oriented triangulation, as already mentioned. For them to retain a heuristic value, they will seek to rely on methodologically motivated and strictly controlled inference and comparison.

4.4.1 Legal Thegnship

In §4.3.1.6 above it has already been pointed out that in Icelandic legal realities there existed a fixed expression, "to put under one's *thegnship*" with the sense "to pledge one's social reputation and integrity". Four additional sources – two Norwegian, one Icelandic, one Swedish – add valuable nuance and make an illustrative use of ON *þegn* in similar contexts. Their information on *thegns* rarely if at all has been present in previous polemics save, perhaps, general comments in editions of Scandinavian laws. Such lacuna warrants taking a closer look at the Nordic legal *thegnship*.

4.4.1.1 testimonies and rulings

Clause 266 of the Norwegian elder *Gulaþingslǫg* lays out a very detailed and complicated procedure of litigation for landed property (odal; on it in this period, see VIGNETTE 5).

land before the 1300s): *Sigurðr ok Þórir, Heðinn ok Hersir reistu stein þenna eptir Þórð Serðu* (?)*, fǫður sinn* ("Sigurðr and Þórir [and] Heðinn and Hersir raised this stone in memory of Þórðr Serða [?], their father").

1508 *Sveinn ok Slóði(?) þeir reistu … … … at fǫður sinn, hersi*(?) *hugsnjallan*(?)*. Hann var und hifni beztr* ('Sveinn and Slóði[?], they raised ... in memory of their father, an able-minded[?] chieftain[?] He was the best under heaven'; Sö 136†). The stone is now lost, but the reading *hersi* (acc./dat. sing. of ON *hersir*) seems uncontroversial.

1509 Öl 2†, Sö 237, Sö 348 (less certain), Sö 349, Sö 353 (less certain), Sm 71, U 34, U 131, U 201, U 353, U 363†, U 372, U 456 (less certain), U 935, U 937 (less certain), U 990, U 991, U 999, U Fv1978;226. See also above, n. 354.

1510 *ÄVgL*, Jordabalken §5, p. 104.

1511 Sö 338, DR 133, DR 314: Jesch 2011, pp. 39–41; Källström 2020, pp. 94–95.

1512 '...Sö 338 inte ger anledning att tro att en man skulle vara någon annans *landmaðr*; det bör istället vara en beteckning på en person som (i detta avseende) inte stod i beroendeställning' (Williams 2021, p. 161).

It boils down to the accurate production of appropriate witness testimonies before two consecutive and *ad hoc* private arbitration courts (ON *dómar*) – private in the sense that they were appointed half and half by the two parties. Upon presenting no less than four distinct sets of witnesses by the claimant in the first instance, the defendant could refute the claim by producing more counter-witnesses in the second. In the case of a tie, sides had an option to refer their case to the third court, here called ON *skiladómr* (lit. untangling court). *Skiladómr* normally established facts in ambiguous legal situations,[1513] just as the two just described. But the clause in question introduces the *skiladómr* as an arbitration in which both sides made a monetary pledge.[1514] It then continues that if the litigants wanted a court of twelve *thegns* (*en ef þeir vilía hava .xij. þegna dom*), six nominated by each side, each of the twelve was to pledge two *aurar*. Their findings were then referred to the assembly of a *fjórðungr* (lit. quarter) within a *fylki* in the law-province covered by *Gulaþingslǫg*.[1515] The *fjórðungr* assembly should make a ruling and the losing side's *thegns* were to forfeit their pledges and pay three marks each to a king's representative (ON *ørendreki*)[1516] for misjudgement (ON *misdœmi*, probably a *hapax legomenon*). Divisive cases went up to the assembly of the *fylki* or even higher up and are of less interests for now. A rather similar procedure is described in *Frostuþingslǫg*.[1517] It specifically calls the third court after the two stymied ones a "pledge" or "wager court" (ON *veðjaðardómr/veðjanardómr*).[1518] It does not re-occur anywhere else in the Nordic legislation[1519] but still seems to be fully synonymous with the *skiladómr* and twelve-*thegn* court from *Gulaþingslǫg*, as there, the litigants 'should refer the decision made by pledge' to the assembly of the *fjórðungr*.[1520] However, *Frostuþingslǫg* makes no mention here of *thegns* introduced with a conditional *if*-clause.

Conversely, *Frostuþingslǫg* mentions twelve *thegns* – 'free men and of full age' (i.e. legally adult: here, over fifteen years)[1521] – who bear testimony that a person accused of murder had an alibi at an assembly, church, feast, or ship with at least twelve oars.[1522] Another interesting case presents itself in the Swedish *Hälsingelagen* ("The Law of Hälsingland"): a

1513 Love et al. 2020, p. 301 (*s.v.* "skiladómr").

1514 [*Þ*]*at kalla menn skila dom. er þeir scolo annattveggia veðía æða af lata annaʀtveggía af sínu male* ('Men call that court of arbitration; they should either submit a pledge or one of the sides should drop his case'; *EGulL* §266, p. 147).

1515 Of the six *fylki* within the medieval Gulathing law-province, four – Hǫrðafylki, Sygnafylki, Firðafylki, and Rygjafylki – were divisible into *fjórðungar* (Simensen and Jørgensen 2021, pp. 6–7).

1516 It is to be considered if ON *ørendreki* was an adaptation of OE *ǣrendraca/ǣrendwreca* (same meaning or messenger) and whether the latter forms were duplets or one was a misinterpretation of the other, since neither simplex (**raca*/**wreca*) is attested. On the one hand, the compound ON *ørendreki* seems only attested in Old Norse–Icelandic. On the other, roots of its components, regardless of ultimate origins, are pan-Germanic, and at least in *Västgötalagen* there once occurs a similar expression, *vræka ærendi sit* (= *konungs*) (lit. press his [= the king's] suit) (*ÄVgL*, Giftermålsbalken §1, p. 75).

1517 *FrostL*, X §15, pp. 220–221; XII §8, p. 239.

1518 *Nú er sá hinn þriði dómr er* [*c*]*veðia scal. eða láti af máli sínu* ('Now the third doom is the one in which the wager is to be made, unless [the one side] drops the suit'; *FrostL*, §25, p. 223) – *cf.* above, n. 1514. The main edition reproduces the reading *cveðia* (normalised ON *kveðja*, lit. to call, summon), which makes little sense in the context, especially since other manuscripts read *veðia* (normalised ON *veðja*, lit. to wager): see *NGL* II, p. 512.

1519 Sunde 2006, pp. 122–123, observes, however, that a similar procedure could be found in Roman law. If it was a leakage from Roman law into *Gulaþingslǫg*, it is by far not the only one: Iversen 2011a; Simensen and Jørgensen 2021, p. 126 (n. 17), 148 (n. 26), 179 (n. 5).

1520 …*scolo skiota dome veðeaðom a fiorðongs þíng* (*EGulL* §266, p. 147).

1521 *FrostL*, IX §22, p. 214. *Landslov* raised the bar to twenty years (*LL*, Arvebolken §§2, 8, 22, I, pp. 438, 440, 496, 531).

1522 *FrostL*, IV §5, pp. 158–159.

host suspected of sheltering outlaws, if they do not wish to pay a fine, may defend themselves with fourteen *thegnly* co-oath-takers.[1523] The number may confound at first, but oaths of fourteen – two preliminary witnesses included in the later twelve co-oath-takers, thus arriving at number fourteen – occur not only in this particular law-code, but also elsewhere in Swedish and Danish legislation too.[1524] The occurrence of OSW. *þæghn* in this one clause is strongly suspect of a Norwegian inspiration: not only does a *thegnly* oath never re-appear in other Swedish legislation, *Hälsingelagen* itself contains obvious borrowings (such as OSW. *bogher* < ON *baugar*, *bauggildr*; OSW. *væzla* < ON *veizla*).[1525] Curiously, the Norwegian inspiration most certainly brought with itself at least one Old English term: OSW. *wærold* < OE *wergild*, a *hapax legomenon* in Nordic idioms.[1526]

The Icelandic *Grágás* contains a plethora of references to *thegns* acting in court. As in the Norwegian legislation, their roles could be two: either as witnesses, or as verdict-makers. In the former case, individually or in groups of two, three, or five, they produced testimonies regarding blood- and in-law relations between interested parties in various legal scenarios – either themselves or to support others' words; regarding people gone missing; to corroborate the evidence they brought when called on as substitutes to legally obligated but absent witnesses.[1527] As witnesses, *thegns* always pledge their *thegnship*, just as in *Brennu-Njáls Saga*. As judges in the Quarter Courts[1528] and in the Fifth Court, *thegns* get to be appointed by *goðar*.[1529] Additonally, twelve nominated by a *goði thegnly* judges are also once found in a confiscation court (ON *fránsdómr*) following cases of outlawry. *Grágás* makes a slip of the pen in a passing that this court is 'to be a court of twelve' *thegns* and is 'to be challenged like a panel of twelve'[1530] (ON *tolftarkviðr*) – another major Icelandic legal institution, otherwise charged with pronouncing verdicts on matters of a greater public interest. The only observable in the text subtle difference in the panel of twelve's and confiscation court's workings seems to be that the latter did not include the *goði* among its members.

We cannot know how *thegns* fulfilled their legal roles in practice except in the account in *Brennu-Njáls Saga* covered above. From it may follow that judges in the Icelandic court indeed assumed a *thegnly* identity when fulfilling their legal duties. In the saga, the foreman of a nine-*thegn* panel announced their findings and opened them by saying:

> Mord Valgardsson called on nine of us thegns; five of us are standing here now, and four have been dismissed. Testimony has been brought against the four who should have made this announcement with us...[1531]

1523 *HälL*, Konungabalker VI §2, p. 23.

1524 E.g., *YVgL*, Tjuvabalken §13, p. 164; Additamentum 2, pp. 223–225; Additamentum 13, pp. 251–253; *SkL* §§30, 68, 69, 78, 80, 84, 127, 131, 132, 142, 147, 162, 230, pp. 30, 43, 56, 59, 62, 95, 98, 107, 117, 129, 186.

1525 Strauch 2011, p. 498 (with further references); Brink 2014a.

1526 Brink 2014a, pp. 44–45.

1527 *GrgKon*, Þingskapaþáttr, I, §§25, 45, pp. 46–50; Arfaþáttr, I, §§126, 127, p. 244–245, 250 (also occurs in *GrgStað*, Erfðaþáttr §§59, 71, pp. 71, 76); Ómagabálkr, II, §§130, 136, pp. 11, 18–19 (also occurs in *GrgStað*, Ómagabálkr §§89, 97, pp. 118–119, 128–129); Festaþáttr, II, §144, §147, pp. 29–30, 32–33, 37–38 (also occurs in *GrgStað*, Festaþáttr §§119, 123, pp. 156, 158–159); *GrgStað*, Landabrigðisþáttr §430, pp. 490–491.

1528 Not to be confused with a quarter assembly in the Gulathing law-province: Icelandic Quarters were the largest administrative divisions in the country.

1529 *GrgKon*, Þingskapaþáttr §§20, 45, pp. 39, 78–79.

1530 *Þar scal vera XII. þegna domr. Dom þan scal ryðia sem XII. quið* (*GrgKon*, Þingskapaþáttr §48, I, p. 84).

1531 *Búar Marðar gengu þá at dómi; talði einn fram kviðinn, en allir guldu samkvæði, ok kvað svá at orði: „Mǫrðr Valgarðsson kvaddi oss kviðar þegna níu, en vér stǫndum nú hér fimm, en fjórir eru ór ruddir; hefir nú váttorð komit fyrir þá fjóra, er bera*

From the phrasing it further seems as if the saga's author recycled some oral legal formula known to the audience from their *Erfahrungsraum*. If this were so, it may strengthen the impression of a specific *thegnly* identity pertinent to the matters of law, or a specific status achieved upon certain social performance.

Chances are, however, very high that the cited instances used ON *þegn* synonymously with other nouns. *Hälsingelagen* features the oath of fourteen more than once, but solely the cited clause reads OSW. *þæghn* instead of OSW. *maþer* (= ON *maðr*).[1532] After mentioning in passing a twelve-*thegn* court and how it is subject to the same rules of recusation as the panel of twelve, the same redaction of *Grágás* later on repeats this stipulation in nearly identical words, only replacing ON *þegnar* by *menn*.[1533] The later *Landslov* copied part of *Frostuþingslǫg*'s cited stipulation on the alibi intact, only instead of *þegnar* GKS, MS 3261 4° reads *men*, while NB, MS 317 4° reads *bøndr*,[1534] – a valuable various reading congruent with the argument of §4.3.1. Further, given this practical synonymity between ON *þegn* and *maðr* observed in laws (see also above, p. 236), the expression "a court of twelve *thegns*" (ON *tolfþegnadómr*) mentioned by *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Grágás* may well be a variation of an umbrella expression "a court/verdict of twelve men" (ON *tolfmannadómr*). This could denote various juridical bodies throughout medieval Scandinavian history,[1535] such as the Norwegian *skiladómr*, *sáttardómr/sættardómr*, or *lagadómr*.[1536] In Iceland, the only time a "court of twelve men" comes up in *Grágás*, the texts does not fail to mention that the means of proof are to be the same as at a confiscation court, which makes one think that it should be the same procedure.[1537]

Effectively, all that these clauses and their textual variations reveal is that in the lexicon of Nordic legislators, if ON *þegn* offered any terminological meaning, it tapered down to denote a legally competent (male) member of a given community that could otherwise pass under other names too.

4.4.1.2 *thegns*' legal agency and eligibility

An interesting problem is to assess the eligibility criteria for such actors. Shared by all Nordic legislation are two common-sense requirements: a maximum impartiality of arbiters, including barring of royal officials to prevent abuses of power;[1538] and legal competency and accountability of witnesses and co-oath-takers. Certain texts presuppose a wide inclusivity

áttu með oss (*Njála*, chap 142, p. 390). To better illustrate the point, I allowed myself to tamper with the original translation by substituting the proposed 'freemen' with "*thegns*".

1532 *HälL*, Kyrkobalken XVII, p. 14; Konungabalker II, p. 19; Ärvdabalken XII §3, XIII §7, pp. 35, 37; Manhelgdsbalken XIV, XVII, XX, XXXI, XXXVII, pp. 49, 51, 52, 57, 60; Jordabalken, p. 66; Köpmålabalken I, p. 68; Byalagsbalken XIV §3, XIX §1p. 78, 81; Rättegångsbalken, V, VII §1, VIII, pp. 87–89, – all these textual instances use *XIIII. manna eþer*.

1533 *Þar scal XII. menn nefna i þaN dom oc scal ryðia sem XII. quið* (*GrgKon*, Þingskapaþáttr §69, I, p. 120), – *cf.* above, n. 1530.

1534 *LL*, Mannhelgeboken §10, I, p. 339 (*variae lectiones* in the footnotes). Manuscripts of *Járnsíða*, where this passage also re-occurs without further alterations (*JS* §24, pp. 267–268), do not contain such various readings.

1535 KLNM XII, pp. 440–450 (*s.v.* "Nämnd"); KLNM III, pp. 214–218 (*s.v.* "Dómr").

1536 Sunde 2014.

1537 *GrgKon*, Festaþáttr §167, pp. 72–74.

1538 The earliest Norwegian legislation recuses from a *dómr* 'near kinsmen', 'agnates and cognates and near kinsmen by marriage', everyone 'who has a lawsuit against the defendant', *lendir menn* and their sons entitled to the same rights, as well as king's *ármenn*, foster fathers, and the dependants from the defendant's freed slaves (or their kin in four generations) (*EGulL* §§37, 266, pp. 58, 146; *FrostL*, X §14, p. 220). *Grágás* similarly gives litigants opportunity to challenge" (i.e. to recuse) the *goði*'s nominees to a *tolftarkviðr* 'in the same way as [nominees in] a court': on account of consanguinity, spiritual relation, or conflict of

conditioned only by the free status of a legal actor, such as *Frostuþingslǫg*'s elaboration that twelve *thegnly* witnesses to an alibi were to be free and legally adult persons. *Gulaþingslǫg* may suggest that such free did not have to be born free, for in disputes concerning shielings and forest land and settled by a (*skila*)*dómr*, testimonies were accepted from anyone free at the moment of the testimony, even if they were a *thrall* when they worked the disputed parcel.[1539] Besides general qualities mentioned above and status and property inviolability, the free in *Frostuþingslǫg* and *Gulaþingslǫg* bore personal military obligation,[1540] even if they became members of other people's households.[1541] As such, they could still request an arbitration court on behalf of absent from home heads of households.[1542] This is perhaps what *Gulaþingslǫg* meant when it first allowed 'any free man' such agency and a few lines below declared that '[a]ll free men are eligible to sit in the' (*skila*?)*dómr*.[1543] If forced to take an urgent recess, a member of an arbitration court was required to leave behind 'gloves or weapons or some other valuable thing',[1544] which parallels the free's universal personal military obligations. The Icelandic judiciary panel of twelve, too, was formed at someone's request by a *goði* from his subordinate *bændr* or the latter's free household members (ON *griðmenn*),[1545] again reminiscent of the Norwegian norms.

Yet other mentions presuppose a somewhat greater exclusivity that hinges on property qualifications necessary for some degree of solvency, which in the agriculture-based economy hinged on landed proprietorship hinted at here and there. As already discussed, ON *bóndi* can mislead as a social term, but in the instance just cited, it probably means *þingfararkaupsbóndi*: someone who met certain property criteria and paid a fee for partaking in public assemblies. It has been assumed that at the end of the 11th century, almost all heads of Icelandic households (ca. 4,560 individuals)[1546] were *þingfararkaupsbændr*. But besides them, Icelandic demographics included various tenants (ON *landbui*, *landseti*, *leiglendingr*, *búðsetumenn*), whose numbers are sadly incalculable. If reading the clause in question legalistically, one may hypothesise that these people were not eligible as adjudicators. It is uncertain if any stock should be put in ON *bændr* occuring in *Landslov* in NB, MS 317 4° as alibi witnesses, because the original *Frostuþingslǫg* does not qualify them in any way other than their personal freedom and legal age. But it also speaks of twelve "best *bændr* within a *fylki*" as witnesses to a licit marriage,[1547] and of the "twelve most prominent and oldest *bændr* within a *fylki*" that settle a *mala fide* litigation.[1548] They were to be impartial and nominated six and six by both litigious parties, thus forming what appears a regular (*skila*)*dómr*. These are hardly carelessly chosen words: the "best *bændr*" of a *fylki* in Þrœndalǫg were an acceptable replacement of the *hǫldar* who formed a pool, appointed half and half by the

interests (*GrgKon*, Þingskapaþáttr §§25, 36, I, pp. 46–50, 66–67). Similar requirements could be found in Austrgautland: KLNM XII, p. 440.

1539 *EGulL* §86, p. 85.

1540 *EGulL* §306, p. 101.

1541 *FrostL*, VII §10, p. 200.

1542 *EGulL* §37, p. 58. *Cf. …hann oc tecr dóm. ef heimamaðr festir fyrr en hann comi fyrir utan þeciuna* ('...he shall [...] agree to accept a doom, if a grithman proposes a doom before he [the suitor] comes from under the roof'; *FrostL*, X §17, p. 221).

1543 *En hver maðr a dóm at festa frialsra manna ef eigi er boande heima* [...] *En menn ero aller domsæter frialse* (*EGulL* §266, p. 146).

1544 *EGulL* §37, p. 58.

1545 *GrgKon*, Þingskapaþáttr §36, pp. 66–67.

1546 Byock 1982, pp. 212–214; Karlsson 2005, p. 514; Benedictow 2003, p. 247.

1547 *….XII. böndr hina bezsto innan fylkis* (*FrostL*, III §1, p. 147).

1548 *….XIJ. böndr hina gegnstu oc hina ellztu innan fylkis* (*FrostL*, XIII §24, p. 247; reproduced in *BjarL* §123, p. 329).

sides, from which a defendant took a required number of non-negotiable co-oath-takers (ON *nefndarvitni*).[1549] The *hǫldar* were the local elite with the inherited right to odal. Even if their material status was becoming less unique, they still constituted the privileged legal rank taken as ground zero in all calculations of monetary compensations (below, §4.4.2). In 13th-century Jutland, '[o]nly freeholders [ODAN. *athelbøndær*] were allowed as *nævninger* (nominated men, members of judicial panels)'. In Skåne, only such freeholders could be 'compurgators [...] in disputes about property'.[1550] *Jyske Lov* particularly dismisses stewards and tenants to serve on judicial panels. Instead, it insists that an *athelbondæ* allowed on the panel need to pay his military dues and own three marks of goods. The requirement of a minimal property qualification for a *nævning* guaranteed the payment of this sum in case of perjury or shirking from responsibility.

Three marks is a rather common fine recorded across the Nordic legislation. But for some it was probably not a trifle sum. At the time, in Norway, a mark could buy more than three cows, or one horse,[1551] or sometimes one slave.[1552] A Norwegian household not supported by at least six cows was exempt from mandatory contribution to a feast at a Church holiday; otherwise, non-contribution was fined by three *aurar*[1553] (three eighths of a mark). During the hunger in the mid-11th century in Iceland, King Haraldr Sigurðarson commanded the freezing of prices for a *skippund* of flour at three marks.[1554] Jutlandic households worth less than two marks were exempt from the military dues[1555] and paying a share of *wergild*, as such paupers (ODAN. *oregheth*, lit. non-owning) owned neither house, nor land.[1556] *Frostuþingslǫg* strongly implies that three marks was a notional threshold of indigence, as people with a lesser net capital were exempt from paying "Peter's pence" (otherwise fined by an *eyrir* for non-paying).[1557] It is possible that, at least in the Gulathing law-province, they were also excused from military service: *Gulaþingslǫg* implies exemption for those who cannot afford it and a three-mark fine for defaulters.[1558] The same fine was meted out for any refuser to act as someone's surety. To the detriment of building local social prestige, people with assets worth less thus could not bail their neighbours.[1559]

As with the Jutlandic *oregheth* people, their poverty likely often owed to them being lackland or land-hungry. *Frostuþingslǫg* laments the paucity of toilers (ON *vinnumenn*) and how 'nobody cares to work for the' *bændr*. Accordingly, it prohibits people without three marks from going trading abroad during summer season,[1560] something 'a great number of poor

1549 *FrostL* IV §8, p. 160; XIV §7, p. 251 (reproduced in *LL*, Landsleiebolken, I, §61, p. 830); XV §11, p. 256 (also repeated in *BjarL* §150, p. 331).
1550 Love et al. 2020, p. 54 (*s.v.* "bonde/bonde/bondi/bóndi/búandi"). See further Andersen 2014.
1551 *EGulL* §218, p. 129; *FrostL*, XV §11, p. 255.
1552 Simensen and Jørgensen 2021, p. 20 (n. 26).
1553 *EGulL* §6, pp. 35–36; see comments by Simensen and Jørgensen 2021, p. 21 (n. 28).
1554 *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 35, pp. 205–206. The editors of the Old Norse text, Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, take a *skippund* as a weighing ca. 150 kg (ÍF XXIII, p. 205 [n. 4]), but the editors of the English translation, Andersson and Gade 2000, p. 436 (n. 3), referred to a newer scholarly estimation of about 125 kg.
1555 *JysL*, Tredje bog §12, pp. 378–380.
1556 *JysL*, Anden bog §24, pp. 188–189.
1557 *FrostL*, II §20, p. 137.
1558 *EGulL* §§296, 301, pp. 160, 162. The later *Landslov* required a basic set of weapons (ON *folkvápn*) – a broad axe or sword, a spear, and a shield – from everyone 'who owns the equivalent of six weighed marks apart from his clothes' (*LL*, Landvernsbolken §12, I, p. 261).
1559 *EGulL* §102, p. 92.
1560 *FrostL*, Inledning §11, p. 125 (reproduced in *LL*, Kjøpebolken §23, II, pp. 931–932).

people' did in Iceland during the aforementioned famine.[1561] In these toilers one will likely recognise the agricultural labourers (ON *verkalýðr*) who reputedly objected to King Hákon inn Góði's introduction of work-free Sundays out of fear of hunger (above, p. 241). It is, of course, debatable how much *Heimskringla* allowed anachronisms in this scene.

Jyske Lov insists that a naysaying nominee to a judicial panel is to be fined three marks as many times as he refuses to accept nomination and until he becomes financially ruined to no longer possess this sum.[1562] From this should follow that an eligible *nævning* typically owned more than three marks. Indeed, the same law does not exclude the possibility that a *bóndi* might own eight marks or more.[1563] A few decades later, the Norwegian legislator considered it possible for a *bóndi* to own eighteen marks. In this case, the *bóndi*'s legally expected military equipment made him almost indistinguishable from the lower ranks of *hirðmenn*.[1564] Granted, it is unlikely that strata of such wealthy *bændr* were overly numerous or inclusive. The 13th century saw a demise of the Danish *athelbøndær*,[1565] and the Norwegian aristocracy shortly before the Black Death probably counted some 600 families, whose 'great majority [...] hardly had much more than the wealthy peasants'.[1566] By the 1360s in Denmark, the "three-mark people" remained a respectable social category, but in the lower ranks of the social hierarchy.[1567]

Notably, just as the delinquent Jutlandic *athelbøndær*, the Norwegian *thegns* who wagered on a losing side in a "pledge court" were fined at the same tariff of three marks. As co-oath-takers, the free ought to be 'held accountable for word and oath', which the later *Landslov* superseded and probably explained as 'not [...] proven guilty of perjury'.[1568] This requirement neatly dovetails with a three-mark fine for false testimonies and ban from future witnessing.[1569] From these details follow two corollaries. First, even though *Frostuþingslǫg* and *Hälsingelagen* do not state it explicitly, truthfulness was *par excellence* most likely an implicit and unarticulated prerequisite for any eligible legal actor they incidentally called a *thegn*. *Grágás* most probably called it one's *thegnship* in the ON formula *at leggja undir þegnskap sín*. Second, legal agency, at least in more serious matters, apparently required some minimum property as indication of one's competency.

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The discussed above legal side of *thegns* as a social category fits neatly with the survey summarised in §4.3.4. As "pillars" of a given local society, Scandinavian *thegns* acted to ensure its smooth legal operation. On the surface, *Gulaþingslǫg* expressly holds "all free men" equally eligible as arbitrators, and *Frostuþingslǫg* seems to concur in respect of alibi witnesses. But some "free men" appear to have been more equal than others. Contextualisation above advises truncating the less well-to-do and unsettled from among such "pillars", as well as those who compromised themselves and paid a three-mark fine. *Brennu-Njáls*

1561 *…fór fjǫlði útan fátækra manna* (*Morkinskinna*, I, chap 35, p. 206).
1562 *…til thæsse han wrthær swo fatik at han hauær æi thre mark with at hættæ* (*JysL*, Anden bog §§50, 51, pp. 225, 230–231).
1563 *JysL*, Tredje bog §12, p. 378. See also Tamm and Vogt 2016, p. 281 (n. 216).
1564 *LL*, Landvernsbolken §12, I, p. 262–263; *Hirðskrá* §30 (35), pp. 128–131.
1565 Gelting 2011.
1566 Bagge 2010, p. 120.
1567 KLNM XVIII, pp. 607–609 (*s.v.* "Tremarksmand").
1568 *EGulL* §§24, 28, 30, 135, pp. 49, 50, 52, 104; *FrostL*, IV §8, XV §11, pp. 160, 256; *LL*, Tyvebolken §14, II, p. 980.
1569 *EGulL* §60, p. 70; KLNM XVIII, p. 608.

Saga, for example, features a *tolfmannadómr* four times, appointed with cognisance of "best men" or "chieftains" (ON *beztir men*, *høfðingjar*), and the fourth time the court of twelve was made of "good men" (ON *góðir menn*) presided over by a *goði*.[1570] It is by all means possible that like in England, it was these people of social weight, underpinned by good reputation and wealth, who also got involved in various legal transactions, such as land purchases or manumissions.

One cannot help but notice another striking parallel with England that plausibly grounds all these qualities and legal agency of the Scandinavian *thegns* back in the late Viking Age, long before it re-appears on the other coast of the North Sea. The thoroughly Scandinavian Wantage law-code of 997 AD portrays a local "Danelaw" community in Northern "Danish Mercia" as legally run in a manner with significant verbal and substantive overlaps with the portrayal in §4.4.1. The first overlap is a legal panel on a wapentake level made of twelve "eldest *thegns*". It is explicitly mentioned in clause 3:1–2, where together with a reeve they apprehend those charged with theft, and implicitly in 13:2,[1571] where their judicial capacity includes some unspecified verdict, although scholars are to this day divided if the two clauses described one and the same workings. The second overlap is the use of OE *dōm* (lit. verdict, cognate with ON *dómr*) in reference to these *thegns*' judgement. The overlap may be purely incidental, as OE *dōm* saw common use in Anglo-Saxon laws.[1572] Clause 4 contains another, also potentially incidental – on account of common sense – overlap. The clause in questions allows a lord to intercede on behalf of his accused (commended?) man and take an oath 'along with two good thegns', or 'two trustworthy thegns', as the corresponding clause in the Woodstock law-code had it.[1573] Late Anglo-Saxon legislation is permeated with trustworthiness required for witnesses and sureties, who are defined as those,

> [...] who ha[ve] never earned a bad reputation and who ha[ve] never failed either in oath or in ordeal.[1574]

The last and unlikely incidental overlap is the six-halfmark (i.e. three marks) fine incurred by the outvoted *thegns*, which immediately recalls of the same fine incurred by *thegns* who wagered on a forfeiting party, according to the *Gulaþingslǫg*. Domesday custumal of this region provides a tentative gauge for the social standing of the thus penalised adjudicators: *thegns* rendered three marks (£2) as their death-duty if they owned six manors or fewer

1570 *Njála*, chaps 70, 74, 123, 145, pp. 173, 180, 311, 412–413.

1571 §3:1. ⁊ *þæt man habbe gemót on ælcum wæpen[t]ace;* ⁊ *gán út þa yldestan xii þegnas* ⁊ *se gerefa mid* ⁊ *swerian on þam haligdome þe heom man on hand sylle, þæt hig nellan ngfinne sacleasan man forsecgean ne nænne sacne forhélan.* §3:2. ⁊ *niman þonne þa tihtbysian men þe mid þam gerefan* [*sace*] *habbað, 7 heora ælc sylle vi healfmarc wedd, healf landrícan* ⁊ *healf wǽpentake.* §13:2. ⁊ *þæt dóm stande þar þegenas sámméle beon; gif hig sacan, stande þæt hig viii secgað; 7 þa þe ðær oferdrífene beoð, gilde heora ælc vi healfmarc* ('§3:1. And a court shall be held in every wapentake, and the twelve leading thegns along with the reeve shall go out and swear on the relics which are given into their hands, that they will not accuse any innocent man or shield any guilty one. §3:2. And then they shall arrest those men of bad repute against whom the reeve is taking proceedings, and each of them shall pay six half marks as security, half to the lord of the manor and half to the wapentake. §13:2. And a verdict in which the thegns are unanimous shall be held valid; if they disagree, the verdict of eight of them shall be valid, and those who are outvoted in such a case shall each pay 6 half-marks'; III Atr 3:1, 13:2, pp. 228, 332). As the number of actors in clause 13:2 is not given, one has to assume it was between ten (because the outvoted party includes a minimum of two indicated by OE plur. *heora*) and fifteen (because eight are an obvious majority), although with permeating presence of dozens, twelve is the most natural assumption.

1572 *Gesetze* II, p. 54 (*s.v.* "dom").

1573 III Atr 4, p. 228; I Atr 1:2, p. 216. The last-cited clause specifies that the trustworthy *thegns* are to be from the hundred in which the case is heard, suggesting a similar principle in the Wantage code.

1574 II Cn 22, p. 324.

and £8 (i.e. twelve marks) if they owned more.[1575] These parallels will be particularly illuminating in answering research Question 3 in §5.3.

Calling such legal arrangements "oligarchic" is probably going a tad too far, but neither does a putative "egalitarianism" withstand scrutiny. Obviously, those endowed with legal agency – the "honorary freemen" from §3.4.5.2 – needed to meet at least some minimal property criterion to be held accountable for misjudgement. These individuals also appear as lords of commended and/or dependent people, and who also assist one another.[1576] However many they may have been, they at the very least certainly met Sverre Bagge's practical criterion – an elevated lifestyle at the expense of others' labour (above, p. 30) – to be considered members of (lower and local) tiers of aristocratic elites.

4.4.2 Thegns *and Landed Proprietorship*

As one of the cornerstones of an elite social position, landed property and its facets were entered on the list of sub-questions within research Question 2. In addition to its own inherent interest, the problem of Scandinavian *thegnly* landownership, suppositionally marked on rune stones, has figured in broader narratives. Klavs Randsborg straightforwardly interpreted the runic commemorative custom as a reflection of royal landed patronage under the Jelling dynasty: a memorial rune stone functioned, in these logics, as a title-deed.[1577] Birgit Sawyer took a more intricate approach. She firmly supported the idea 'that almost all inscriptions reflect inheritance and property rights' but also that there was 'a need among the leading men, *old* magnates and *new royal agents*, to defend old and new rights to land, titles, and power' (italics in the original). In her view, *thegns* were agents of kingship, but she left unanswered the question of whether they were newly-implanted into the social landscape (and hence were rewarded with lands) or if they rather were initiative local proprietors who sought the Danish kings' favour (and thereby confirmation to previous property rights).[1578]

Sadly, only two literary Old Norse sources, poetic at that, explicitly situate Scandinavian *thegns* in this context. In his cause to appease King Magnús in the already quoted *Bersǫglisvísur*, the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson reprimanded the young king for forcefully seizing his *thegns*' odal in Þrœndalǫg:

> They all say the same thing: 'my lord appropriates his *thegns*' odals'; proud farmers [*bœndr*] revolt. That man, who parcels out his patrimony to the king's counts according to precipitate rulings, will call that robbery.[1579]

1575 *DB* I, fol. 280c (NTT S2–3).

1576 *Cf.* the Woodstock rules on how a lord is to cleanse himself of not abetting an accused from among his subordinates to flee: '...he shall choose five thegns, and shall himself make a sixth', '...he shall clear himself with [the help of] five thegns, himself making a sixth' (*…nime him fif ðegnas to ⁊ beo him sylf syxta ⁊ ladie hine ðæs*; *…ladie hine mid fif ðegnum ⁊ beo him sylf sixta*; I Atr 1:8, 1:12, p. 218).

1577 Randsborg 1980, chap 3.

1578 Sawyer 2000, pp. 47, 147 (italics in the original).

1579 *Eitt es mál, þats mæla: 'minn dróttinn leggr sína eign á óðǫl þegna'; ǫfgask búendr gǫfgir. Rán mun seggr, hinns sína selr út, í því telja, flaums at fellidómi fǫðurleifð konungs greifum* (Sigv *Berv* 14). I allowed myself to change 'subjects' and 'ancestral properties' of the original translation for "*thegns*" and "odals" for ease of illustration. On Þrœndalǫg in the Viking Age more generally, see a succinct overview by Sundqvist 2016, pp. 46–53, and a separate study by Røskaft 1999. Sigvatr's use of ON *greifar* (lit. counts) suggests that the expropriations were conducted by the king's liegemen, because Snorri Sturluson explains that those who are appointed by kings as local administrators 'are called *hersar* [lords] or landed men in the Scandinavian language, but *Grafen* in Saxony...' (*heita þeir hersar eða lendir menn í Danskri tungu, en greifar í Saxlandi…*; *Skáldskaparmál* 53, 80 [ll. 3–4]).

Sigvatr's admonition stands in stark contrast to *Hrynhenda*, *Magnússdrápa* ("*Drápa* for Magnús in the Flowing Metre") by Arnórr Jarlaskáld Þórðarson (*c.* 1012–1070s) a few years later (1046 AD). In his eulogy to the king, Arnórr extolled the monarch's victories and recognition by the Norwegians by means of taking for himself *thegns*' odal:

> Confidant of men [RULER], you came to win the odals of *thegns*, all of Norway; no other monarch, lord of the Mœrir [NORWEGIAN KING = Magnús], will clear himself lands when younger than you.[1580]

Despite the potential baggage of terminological uncertainty due to the poetic language, Sigvatr and Arnórr's word choice may reflect more than just the lexical conventions of the skaldic genre. In order to assess the coincidentiality of these stanzas, the subject of odal must be broached.

Vignette 5. The Entanglements of Odal

Similarly to bookland in Anglo-Saxon historiography (see VIGNETTE 3), odal (ON *óðal*) and the legal-economical phenomenon it covers has had a lasting research tradition.[1581] From attestations in other Germanic languages (Gothic 𐌷𐌰𐌹𐌼𐍉𐍈𐌰𐌻 [*haimoþla*; acc. plur.], OE *ēðel*, OHG [*fater*]*uodil*/*ōdhil*, OS *ōdil*/*ōthil*, Old Frisian *ēthel*) and their contextual use, the reconstructed PGMC **ōþala-* is assigned a core meaning "patrimony".[1582] Unlike other Germanic languages in which the corresponding cognates seem to have belonged predominantly to the poetic linguistic registers,[1583] in Scandinavia, ON *óðal* has developed a juridical application and, conversely, saw limited use in poetry.[1584] Its descendants (NORW. *odel* and compounds) are still part of legal vocabulary in, for example, present-day Norway.[1585]

The two definitive features of the odal type of landed property as it is known from Nordic (especially Norwegian) high medieval legislation and charters are:

- the right of first refusal, i.e. the obligation of a seller of odal to first offer it to relatives who are thus entitled to the right of pre-emption;
- the necessity of land to stay in familial possession over a certain amount of time before it enters the category of odal.

The latter of the two pertains first of all to the Norwegian conditions. *Gulaþingslǫg* prescribed a five-generation long possession of land for it to become odal in the sixth.[1586] *Frostuþingslǫg* limited the term to three consecutive generations and the odal status in the fourth.[1587] *Landslov* built upon the latter regulation and regarded a sixty-year long possession as another precondition for a claim to the

1580 *Eignask namtu óðal þegna allan Nóreg, gotna spjalli; manngi ryðr þér mildingr annarr, Mœra gramr, til landa æ*ri (Arn *Hryn* 8). As in Sigvatr's stanza above, I altered the *SkP*'s 'patrimony' and 'liegemen' to "odals" and "*thegns*" to illustrate the point of this sub-chapter.

1581 For this section, the following works were consulted: KLNM XII, pp. 493–503; Zachrisson 1994b; 2017; RLGA XXI, pp. 533–538 (*s.v.* "Odal"); Gelting 2000, pp. 133–165; Brink 2002, pp. 103–105; Iversen 2008, pp. 66–74; Vogt 2010, chap 13; Runer 2012, pp. 448–452; Vogt and Sigurðsson 2019, pp. 118–119; Dørum 2020; Norseng 2022, – *cf.* a parallel approach to the same material as in Norseng's article by Agisjev 2020. On the related insular phenomenon, see Jones 2013.

1582 Kroonen 2013, p. 395 (*s.v.* "ōþala-").

1583 An allowance must be made for smaller corpora of continental Germanic languages of the first millennium AD. At the same time, in the very well-documented Old English, OE *ēðel* is disproportionately common in poetry (with a rather generic meaning "fatherland", "home[land]") and rather rare in prose (DOE, *s.v.* "ēþel").

1584 No attestation in Eddic poetry, according to Kellogg 1988, and merely 13 in skaldic, according to a wildcard search for "óð-" in the *SkP* online.

1585 Kleven 2004.

1586 *EGulL* §266, p. 147.

1587 *FrostL*, XII §4, p. 237.

odal status.[1588] The right of first refusal and pre-emption (NORW. *odelsrett*, DAN. *lovbydelse*, SW. *börd srätt*) is shared by all three Nordic kingdoms. In the Danish *Skånske Lov* ("The Law of Skåne"), the right to pre-emption (ODAN. *laghbjuthe*) appears rather rudimentary and the law protects the buyer, which in and of itself suggests that familial claims to sold land used to be common enough. Later Danish laws rather developed a stronger right of kin-groups to revoke unauthorised land transactions that went against their right of first refusal. The Swedish legislation displays a variety in respect of pre-emption, though it and obligation to have thrice offered land to relatives at the beginning of a purchase process are common to all Swedish *Provincial Laws*. Diagnostically, the Danish laws contain no description of the procedure of how land had to be offered, and the Swedish ones never explicitly circumscribe the circle of relatives who could claim land through pre-emption.[1589] In Norway, the regulations on pre-emption (ON *óðalsbrigði*) sequentially took the most restrictive forms. The chronologically earliest *Gulaþingslǫg* was written so as to safeguard the buyer's interests: the vendor's relatives could use their right of pre-emption over less than a year only. The slightly later *Frostuþingslǫg* extended the period over which the vendor themselves could revoke the sale to twenty years. *Landslov* radically took the side of the vendor's kin: even if they could not buy the land offered to a third party at the time of purchase, they might exercise their right to pre-emption over sixty years to come. Further, *Landslov* introduced primogeniture as the governing principle, so that the eldest son got the main farm (ON *hǫfuðból*; see NORW. *åsetesrett*, lit. right to settlement), and gave preference to male inheritors. This proverbial tightening of screws over the course of the 13th century supports the view that odal had used to be a looser category before. Thus, *Gulaþingslǫg* contains two potentially contradictory definitions thereof. Clause 270 lists seven kinds of odal land: generically inherited, received as *wergild*, foster inheritance, honorary landed property, gift from the king for hospitality, foster payment, exchanged odal land, and a portion of partitioned odal inheritance. All other land, the clause concludes, should follow the rules applicable to movable property.[1590] Clause 266 that deals with disputes over titles to odal land, however, suggests that the (only?) way to obtain it was through consecutive possession in five generations, though clauses 103–104 in line with clause 270 imply that *any* inherited land was odal, or at least they treat it indiscriminately. Mere "possession" and fuller "ownership" seem to have had a meaningful legal distinction in the Nordic legal framework.[1591] In the same clause 266, the defendant's five ancestors must "have owned" the land (*langfeðra sínna .v. er átt hava*) but he himself must have had it 'both in ownership and in odal' (*bæde atte at eign oc at oðrle*). The exact same expression in runes is used of, apparently, a fishing ground in Sele (South-Western Coastal Norway) some 200 years prior,[1592] but also in much later in Norwegian documentation of the 13th–14th centuries[1593] and prose.[1594] Similarly, in clause 285, a distinction is drawn between odal and acquired land (ON *fǫng*) that was subject to rules regulating movable property.[1595]

The main bone of contention are odal's antiquity and roots. In the period of Norwegian national Romanticism, odal was seen as a hallmark of the country's long-standing democratic traditions, so that *åsetesrett* and *odelsrett* found their way into the Norwegian constitution of 1814. In course of the following century, odal was adopted by legal historians and considered an inherent feature of "(Ur)-Germanic law" that set kin-based and "democratic" Germanic peoples in contrast to the stately-organised and "aristocratic" Romans and had allegedly been inherited from a pre-historic past. With the stout criticism of the German school of historical jurisprudence in the 1970s and onwards, two things became glaringly apparent. First, that family pre-emption right governed high-medieval land law in many parts of Europe, not just the Nordic countries, and, second, that

1588 *LL*, Odelsløsningsbolken §4, II, pp. 558–562.

1589 In elder *Västgötalagen*, the entitled kin probably included six generations, because six generations were entitled to a portion of *wergild* (*ÄVgL*, Mandråpsbalken §1:5, p. 28). Given the potential influnce from *Gulaþingslǫg* (above, nn. 1329 and 1363), it is patently impossible to know whether this rule had been aboriginal.

1590 *EGulL* §270, pp. 151–152.

1591 On this fundamental distinction, arising from the Roman law, and its implementation in the medieval North (on the Danish example), see Hybel 2018, pp. 187–199.

1592 §A *Máli er á steini þessum, a[t]* … §B *vǫrp liggja hǫlf til* … §C *at eign ok at óðli* … ('§A The agreement on this stone is, that... §B half of the warping-line lie to... §C as property and as allodial land...'; N 236).

1593 One such charter is discussed by Sundqvist 2016, pp. 448–449.

1594 ONP (*s.v.* "óðal: • eign ok/... óðal").

1595 *EGulL* §285, p. 157.

the five/three-generation rule is strongly suspect of an influence from canon law and its method of calculating blood relationship:

From the 9th century, ecclesiastics strove to prevent marriages between anyone closer than seventh cousins.[1596] But in Norway in 1152/1153 AD, the limitation was eased and marriages from the sixth generation became licit. In 1215 AD, the Fourth Lateran Council went further and allowed matrimony at the passing of just four generations. Clause 282 of *Gulaþingslǫg* explicitly ties together odal and kinship defined by forbidden degrees of consanguinity:

> The latter branch does not lose its odal-rights (to the land which passed to the other branch) until a man in either branch may marry the daughter of one in the other,[1597]

– that is to say, until six ancestors stood between the spouses, according to clause 24.[1598] This stipulation is therefore fully consonant with the definition of odal as land in family possession in preceding five consecutive generations which thus must have been enacted between 1152/1153 and 1215 AD. The odal rule of three-generation consecutive possession in *Frostuþingslǫg*, accordingly, must date between 1215 and 1274 AD.

Archaeologists and scholars of religion object to these arguments along two lines. First, it has been noted that some Norwegian legislation regulates that proving lawful entitlement to land required one to recite their lineage back to an ancestor who owned the disputed land at the time of pre-Christian burial mounds, ON *haugóðalsmaðr* (lit. burial-mound odal-man). According to the Swedish archaeologist Torun Zachrisson, while in large parts of the Scandinavian ecumene, mound burials were built continuously from the Bronze Age, in (central) Sweden they really took off after the climatic crisis of 536/537 AD.[1599] Unlike earlier times, burial prominence was given to adult men over women and children, and settlements used to be stationary. Together, these facts suggest continuous cultivation and patrilineal descent of family land marked in the landscape by mounds erected over male progenitors through whom claims to land were secured. Granted, this evidence commands an indirect probative force. But, second, a more secure and hard to deny evidence are two rune stones that enumerate five ancestors to their sponsors,[1600] as well as further four that specifically call the land a sponsor owned his odal.[1601] All six are spread over the 11th century, long before the dispensation from the seventh-degree canonical dogmata in Norway. One of them, as mentioned above, employed the same ownership formula as clause 266 in *Gulaþingslǫg* (ON *at eign ok óðli*; above, n. 1592), and another specifically called the five named forefathers the sponsor's *langfeðgar* (lit. agnate paternal ancestors)[1602] – exactly the same term as found in the same clause. Finally, the Eddic *Hyndluljóð* ("Song of Hyndla"; dated by Christopher Sapp to the late 11th century) centres on the recital of five semi-divine paternal and maternal ancestors of one Óttarr to him by the *vǫlva* Hyndla for Óttarr to win his patrimony (ON *fǫðurleifð* – *cf.* above, n. 1579: Sigvatr clearly used it synonymously with ON *óðal* in one and the same stanza) in a lawsuit. Torun Zachrisson, for example, estimates on these grounds that as a legal phenomenon odal must date from the Viking Age and have roots earlier still.

Accepting this argumentation accounts for the Eddic and runic textual evidence but poses questions of its own. First among them: if, as argued, rune stones served as titles to land that passed on the five-generation rule, why in such an impressive corpus did only two sponsors (506 kms apart in a direct line) care to trace their lineages five generations back, and all others were content with only the closest relatives?[1603] Zachrisson herself noted that the stock of names in Sm 71 looks odd:

1596 Bouchard 2001, pp. 40–49, and esp. fig. 3.1 at p. 42.

1597 *En eigi skiliasc oðol með þeim at helldr fyʀ en hvártveggía ma eiga dottor annars* (*EGulL* §282, p. 156).

1598 *En oss er sva lovat at taca at siaunda kne. Oc siaunda lið frendkonor varar* ('We are allowed to marry our kinswomen in the seventh knee and the seventh degree [of kinship]'; *EGulL* §24, p. 48).

1599 Zachrisson 2017, pp. 128–129.

1600 Sm 71 and Hs 14.

1601 U 130, Sö 145, N 210, and N 236.

1602 *Erinvarðr lét reisa stein þenna eptir Hegga, fǫður sinn, ok Hæru, fǫður hans, ok Karl, hans fǫður,* [*ok*] *Hæru, hans fǫður, ok Þegn, hans fǫður, ok eptir þá langfeðga fimm* ('Erinvarðr had this stone raised in memory of Heggi, his father and Hæra, his [i.e. Heggi's] father, and Karl, his [i.e. Hæra's] father and Hæra, his father and Þegn, his father and in memory of these five forefathers'; Sm 71).

1603 The theory that rune stones marked inheritance property rights was put forth by Birgit Sawyer in her many works. It has met critique by, e.g., Vogt 2010, pp. 175–177, and Elsa Sjöholm (references in the

one Erinvarðr, a bearer of a dithematic name that literally means "eagle-guardian" and 'that gives elite associations', traces his origins from bearers of monothematic names, two of which alliterate and mean "old age" (Hæra) and "bird cherry tree" (Heggi), and two (Karl and Þegn) suspiciously correspond to the eponymous progenitors of the "commoners" in *Rígsþula* (above, p. 246).[1604] Could it be that Erinvarðr claimed titles he did not rightfully have (or: that were threatened?) and presented a fictitious genealogy, elements in which had some subtle double meaning (e.g., "*my *legally entitled* ancestors have from *the old age* owned this place where *bird cherry trees* grow", – of course, this is nothing more than a rough a speculation on my part)? Alternatively, we may speculate that ancestor enumerating might not (solely) have to do with property and more with its owner's personal status. In *Frostuþingslǫg*, for instance, a free-born person (ON *árborinn maðr*, lit. ere-born) dispelled doubts of his free status by

> [...] enumerate[ing] his four ancestors [*langfeðr*], free-born men, he being himself the fifth [in line], and let him have two free-born householders [*árbornir bændr*] as witnesses to this.[1605]

Contextually, it seems as if such free-born were descendant from the freed people: first, the enumeration procedure is entered into a clause that opens with the statement that the freed (ON *leysingr*/*leysingr*) will maintain dependence on their former masters and continues with the procedure of proving a freed person's freedom; second, the next clause stipulates that the freed people's dependence on their former masters lasts four generations and is absolved in the fifth.[1606] This conjecture agrees with *Landslov*'s (and other derivative legislation) slight alteration of *Frostuþingslǫg*'s take on treason: *Frostuþingslǫg* prescribes a son of a *bóndi* in royal service to prosecute an accused freedman or dependant,[1607] but in *Landslov* he prosecutes a free-born, who is explained as 'someone who has achieved all rights'.[1608] Second, what are we to do with an undisputed and securely later ecclesiastical definition of kinship that openly ties in with the odal in the Norwegian legislation? Then there is the problem of geography and chronology: the five-generation inheritance principle is recorded in Western Norway, far away from the runic evidence in Småland (Sm 71) and Hälsingland (Hs 14); its alleged existence as a pan-Scandinavian phenomenon already in the Viking Age defuses this incongruence but falls short of explaining its absence in later Danish or Swedish medieval law. In this line of thinking, the two runic inscriptions acquire a somewhat *deus-ex-machina* explanatory status on a matter plausibly explained by legal historians as arising from a complex situation of a new land "market" in which the Church and laity vied for a valuable and, in Norwegian geographic realities, particularly limited resource.

Perhaps, these and accompanying contra-directional pieces of evidence have so far prevented the appearance of an exhaustive synthetic history of odal as a legal phenomenon with roots in pre-history. The current vignette does not aspire to be such either. It is probably safest to assume that ON *óðal* indeed found use in reference to patrimonial landed property in the Viking Age, but it still lacked a single definition, as the cited clauses from *Gulaþingslǫg* reveal. Odal's formalisation that in modern times passes under NORW. *odelsrett* could have been a reaction to new historical conditions, namely the appearance of what approximates a land "market" and a new economic actor, the Church. Very probably, as hinted at by the struggle in Sweden between the Church's insistence on individuals' rights to freely donate it land and the laity's familial obstructionist claims to such endowments since at least Nicholas Breakspear's mission in 1152 AD,[1609] this precision followed what

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last-cited item) which weakens the otherwise conjecture about Sm 71 and Hs 14. The total number or rune stones listing three generations or more is 17. Notably, at least one rune stone (U 209) says that the sponsor purchased (ON *keypti*) the estate (ON *býr*) to which it belonged.

1604 Zachrisson 2017, p. 124.

1605 *...þá teli hann fióra langfeðr sína til árborinna manna. En siálfr hann hinn .v. oc hafi til þess .lj. búanda vitni árborinna* (*FrostL*, IX §10, p. 211).

1606 *FrostL*, IX §11, p. 211.

1607 *FrostL*, IV §4, p. 158.

1608 *En sa er arboren maðr er komen. er. til allz. rettar* (*LL*, Mannhelgebolken §3, I, p. 305; repeated in *BjarL*, Mannhelgebolk §3, p. 211; *ƷB*, Mannhelgi §2, p. 34, here, ON *árborinn maðr* is translated as 'who has come into full possession of a free man's legal status'). Noteworthily, neither ON *árborinn maðr*, nor *leysingi* re-occur in *Landslov*, – a sure indicator of an accelerating homogenisation of the Norwegian countryside and wane of importance of one's genealogy.

1609 Runer 2012, pp. 604–610.

Elsa Sjöholm called a "colonisation" of Scandinavia by the Church. Accordingly, formalisation and legalisation of previous customs could have reinvigorated a use of the past: it has been demonstrated that many mounds north-east of Oslo, previously believed to originate in the Viking Age, are in fact hollow, often lack any burials or ties with local rune stones, but are connected to nearby farms.[1610] As argued by Knut Dørum, in Norway, where the most stringent rules eventually applied, the said reaction suited first of all the interests of aristocratic landed proprietors who, just like in Sweden, strove to assemble or retain larger landed estates – he maintains the lack of importance of odal for non-top peasantry until the modern period.[1611]

By its very design the earliest Scandinavian legislation, as has been pointed out many times, incorporated pre-existing legal language. It is thus probable that the Viking-Age notions of ancestral landed proprietorship were the raw material from which the medieval odal formed in new socio-legal and economic[1612] circumstances. But whichever interpretation – legal historical or runological and archaeological – one prefers, odal ought to be considered an essentially aristocratic type of landed property that was easiest to acquire through inheritance and that could have been a notional physical embodiment of its owner's social status. That ON *þegn* figures in at least one genealogy of such proprietors warrants this excursus all the more in a study about Scandinavian *thegns*.

4.4.2.1 confluence of landed proprietorship and social status

For all that we know, odal's leading feature had always been its ancestral nature, but as a landed property phenomenon with concrete juridical characteristics under this name, odal is best known from high medieval Norwegian and, to a lesser extent, Swedish laws and documentary genres.[1613] Danish legislators did not use ON *óðal* altogether (though the word and its compound, ODAN. *athelbondæ*, are well-attested), and in Iceland, while known from sagas, into legal prose it was introduced only in *Járnsíða* and *Jónsbók* after submission to the Norwegian monarchy. Despite the previous frequent acceptance of the *Provincial Laws* as an ostensibly fossilised source for the Viking Age, the present consensus advises caution (see VIGNETTE 5). To collate it to the semiotic triangle (above, p. 32), as regards the 1030–1040s when Sigvatr and Arnórr mentioned the Norwegian *thegns*' odals, we may be certain of the existence of all its vertices – word/symbol, concept/thought, phenomenon/referent, – but unable to definitively and legalistically precisely circumscribe the latter of the three for the first half of the 11th century. Notwithstanding, the vertex of concept may prove to be a viable depository to still be mined for historical data. In this approach, an exemplary precedent has been set by Aron Gurevich who, originally schooled in the Soviet materialist tradition of the 1940s, later transcended its earthbound restraining limits and came to treat

> [t]he question of land ownership [as] an integral part of a broader question about people's relationship to nature, society, and themselves.[1614]

1610 Skre 1998, pp. 198–213.

1611 Dørum 2020, *passim*. *Cf.* a similar opinion of Vogt and Sigurðsson 2019, p. 119.

1612 On the ongoing debate about the Viking-Age agricultural landscape and its eventual transition to better known medieval forms, see: Poulsen and Sindbæk 2011b; Iversen 2019.

1613 Love et al. 2020, p. 265 (*s.v.* "oþal/óðal/oþol" and compounds).

1614 Gurevich 2009, p. 6 *et passim* (quoted article originally published in 1997). His break-away from a materialist and transition to a conceptual approach, particularly after facing ideologically charged criticism of his *Problems of the Formation of Feudalism in Western Europe* (1970; translated into Swedish in 1979; Italian in 1982; Romanian in 1990) at home, ensured Gurevich's international appreciation as a historical anthropologist. This shift also liberated him from coercive constraints of Soviet Marxist paradigms and older epistemes, only exacerbated by the Iron Curtain and restrained by it access to up-to-date literature (as he himself acknowledged, e.g., at p. 292 of the *Selected Works*, – to be fair, a comprehensive study of the sort he envisaged and whose absence he lamented would not come out until decades after his own publication:

ON *óðal* is etymologically ultimately connected to PGMC **aþala-* with a reconstructed meaning "nature" and whose descendants via PGMC **aþulja-* in Western Germanic languages mean "noble".[1615] In Old Norse, a corresponding adjectival cognate, ON *aðal-*, appears only as the first element in compounds where it metaphorically means "prime", "chief", and in laws – "true", "legitimate", "proper", where it also appears interchangeable with the prefixal *oðal-*.[1616] Unchecked use of etymological reasoning in historical research may be fraught with speculation, of course. Assuming a full cross-over between the two lexemes or that odal used to be a prerequisite of a putative "ancient Germanic" clan nobility,[1617] requires substantiation. But reasons present themselves to detect a confluence between possession of odal and perceived social status all the same.

This connexion manifests itself particularly clearly in the narratives about the Norwegian kings' encroachment upon or, conversely, mending of the *status quo* and a putative social contract with the ruled. The *Sturlubók* redaction of the Icelandic *Landnámabók* (composed before 1284 AD but potentially based on a 12th-century prototype)[1618] recounts the emigration motives of one of the first-generation colonists in this country, the viking warlord and son of a petty king Geirmundr Heljarskinn in the late 9th century. Upon returning from a raid home to Rogaland (Western Coastal Norway), where he had ruled (*átti ríki á*), he found that King Haraldr inn Hárfagri had conquered all of Rogaland after his victory at the Battle of Hafrsfjord and 'took there from many men's their odals' (*tekit þar marga menn af óðulum sínum*),[1619] implying Geirmundr's as well. Somewhat earlier, *Heimskringla* states of King Haraldr that in every *fylki* where he spread his dominion, he installed his subordinate jarls and *hersar* with military obligations and oversight of laws and revenues, of the latter of which a third was allocated for these men's own maintenance; he made all the *bændr*, 'both rich and poor', pay him land rents (*landskyldir*) and took for himself "all odals" (*eignaðisk óðǫl ǫll*).[1620] His son, King Hákon inn Góði, revoked this latter policy in Þrœndalǫg, to the great delight of the local *bændr* whose support Hákon sought and whom he, *Heimskringla* remarks, made odal-born (ON *óðalbornir*).[1621] *Oláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka* and *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar* ("Egil's Saga") term the object of King Haraldr's acquisitions "all land and all odals" (*allt land ok ǫll óðǫl* and in a metathetic manner *ǫll óðǫl ok allt land*), while *Gísla Saga Súrssonar* ("Gisli Sursson's Saga") conflates them into "all land estates" (*jarðir allar*). All three of the last-named sources agree that the said object was 'both settled and not' (*bæði byggðir*

Røskaft 2003). These limiting factors negatively influenced his early socio-economic essays and, may I be forgiven, dulled the sharpness of his critical edge (I briefly touch upon this in Sukhino-Khomenko and Guimon 2022, pp. 107–109). Conversely, his historical anthropological works concerning odal found wider interest and have been instrumental in shaping my own understanding.

1615 Kroonen 2013, pp. 40 (s.vv. "*aþala-" and "*aþulja-"), 395 (s.v. "*ōþala-").

1616 Love et al. 2020, p. 36–37 (*s.v.* "aþal").

1617 E.g., Neckel 1916; Kauffmann 1918, pp. 195–202 (through a convoluted connection to MHG *hantgemâl*, another problematic medieval legal term).

1618 Callow 2017, p. 17.

1619 *Landnámabók*, p. 152. The unrecorded socio-political situation in this region receding these events was sketched by Myhre 1993. The pre-"viking" development has been studied by Iversen 2018, pp. 721–746.

1620 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 6, p. 98.

1621 *HáGóHkr*, chaps 1, 15, pp. 151, 170. A reminiscent story relates to the tenurial conditions in Orkney, where the *bændr* agreed to a jarl's offer to singlehandedly pay the full *wergild* for a previous killing of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's son in exchange for "all odals" in Orkney, so that the jarls owned them for about a hundred years until an eventual restitution by one of them to win the Orcadians' help (*HaHáFgHkr*, chap 31, p. 134; *Orkneyinga Saga*, chaps 8, 11, pp. 16, 25). Curiously though, later on another jarl raised money by offering the *bændr* to buy their odals once and for all instead of introducing inheritance tax on odals (*Orkneyinga Saga*, chap 76, p. 174).

ok sætr; *byggt ok óbyggt*; *byggðar ok óbyggðar*, accordingly) and included 'outlying islands' and 'all forests and wastelands' (*úteyjar* and *alla auðn landsins*), according to *Oláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka*, and/or 'equally all seas and freshwater lakes' (*jafnvel sjóinn ok vǫtnin*), according to *Egils Saga* and *Gísla Saga*. All three further agree that all the *bœndr* had to become the king's tenants (*leigumenn ok landbúar*; *leiglendingar*; *jarðbyggjendr*), including, according to *Egils Saga*, those not employed in farming – everyone owed the king rents or (unsevered from them?) obedience (*lýðskyldir*).[1622] Accordingly, the medieval Icelandic historical tradition conceived of King Haraldr's rulership as tyranny and oppression that caused the emigration to and eventual colonisation of Iceland.[1623]

These and related narratives strongly resemble the poetic testimony of the socio-legal mechanics of treating *thegns* employed by King Magnús inn Góði and the explanatory prose context. The problems surrounding these accounts can be grouped into two major strands. On a historical-theoretical level, the modern middle ground that the 'onerous and repressive measures' to sustain King Haraldr's 'large bands of warriors' 'may have made the freeholders feel that they were no longer the masters of their own land'[1624] results from a protracted and by now stymied discussion of the exact nature of King Haraldr's appropriations and King Hákon's reversions.[1625] Comparisons and parallels were sought with both Anglo-Saxon folkland and Carolingian "vassalage". While some suggested a radical change in property types, others interpreted the sagas' words as an introduction of imposts (poll tax or otherwise) that, some maintained, fell into the category of public law but, others believed, could have instead belonged to private law. On a source-critical level, the historical validity of the events as they were entered into the 13th-century sagas has raised their own concerns.

On account of biographical inconsistencies, lack of mentions in contemporaneous outside sources, instrumental role in both Norwegian and Icelandic historical traditions as a founding figure, the very historicity of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri, at least as described in medieval prose sources, has been put into doubt (above, n. 45). Doubts further creep in about how much his rather sophisticated two-tier administrative innovations were literary only, perhaps driven by *Heimskringla*'s alleged author's "formidable historical sense of order", as it was characterised by Knut Helle on this matter.[1626] Inspired by later praxes,[1627]

1622 *ÓlHlSer*, chap 1, p. 7 (ll. 14–20); *Egils Saga*, chap 4, p. 5 (ll. 4–7); *Gísla Saga*, chap 5, p. 17.

1623 Boulhosa 2005, chap 4, supplemented by Appendix 3 (pp. 228–232) with various excerpts from further eleven *Íslendingasögur* and *þættir*.

1624 Krag 2003, p. 188. *Cf.* Dørum and Holberg 2017, p. 125: "No one believes [...] *Heimskringla* [...] that Haraldr appropriated all odals in the country or secured for himself some sort of property right to all land estates. [...] But together these sagas testify to a historical core of the truth that King Haraldr demanded some economic activity of sorts" (*Ingen trur heller på* [...] *Heimskringla* [...] *at Harald tileigna seg all odelen i landet, eller sikra seg ein slags eigedomsrett til all jord.* [...] *Men saman vitnar desse sagaene om ein historisk kjerne av sanning, at kong Harald kravde ei økonomisk yting av noko slags*).

1625 Critically reviewed and summarised by Gurevich 1957; Kleven 2004, pp. 78–87.

1626 '...formidable historisk ordenssans' (Helle 1993, p. 150).

1627 *Heimskringla*'s words that, 'He set a jarl in every district [*fylki*] who was to administer the laws of the land and collect fines and land dues' (*Hann setti jarl í hverju fylki, þann er dœma skyldi lǫg ok landsrétt ok heimta sakeyri ok landskyldir*) and that 'his jarls had more power than kings had had in the past' (*...jarlar hans hǫfðu meira ríki en konungar hǫfðu fyrrum*; *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 6, p. 98), – are rather reminiscent of the administrative capacities of later *sýslumenn* (Orning and Poulsen 2019, pp. 226–231). The allocation of a third of the administered income to own maintenance is strongly redolent of the Anglo-Saxon "earl's third penny" (Kjartansson 2006). Sunde 2006, pp. 121–122, seconds Kjartansson's opinion that the whole trope of odal-taking is modelled on King William I's conquest of England. That *Heimskringla*'s author could at times resort to later events as a model for King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's reign was further argued by Iversen 2021, p. 37,

Heimskringla may have introduced them as a narrative device to make a certain point about the king and then, facing their subsequent historical non-existence, elegantly retracted them from the story by ascribing their dismantlement to King Haraldr's unruly sons. In the same vein, land rents by tenants on royal manors as a major source of permanent royal income (up to one third) belong to the 13th century,[1628] not the 9th or 10th. Of the five cited sources that explicitly state King Haraldr's appropriations (ON *taka*, *eignask*) of odal or land, three are suspected of common authorship[1629] and could further have been inspired by Sigvatr and Arnórr's aforementioned poetry included in *Heimskringla*, thus reducing the number of independent testimonies. They are further threatened by (near) verbatim overlaps between the earlier *Egils Saga* and the later *Gísla Saga* (as well as the late *Bárðar Saga* ["Bard's Saga"], for that matter).[1630] This is by far not an isolated case. Patricia Boulhosa drew particular attention to the marked repetition of the same lexical expressions employed in *Íslendingasögur* and *þættir* to convey the sufferings of the future Icelanders on account of King Haraldr's supposed despotism.[1631] These expressions include ON *flýja/fyrirláta óðǫl sín* (lit. to flee from/leave behind one's odals; once synonymously swapped for ON *eignir sínar*, lit. one's possessions). For what it is worth, whatever the balance between their factual bearing on the Viking-Age historical events and a possible retrospective projection of the 13th-century Icelandic–Norwegian relations, if veracious, these accounts within the medieval Icelandic foundation myth may be an inflated recycling of the coloured and embittered opinions of the dispossessed. It may, in fact, turn out, that the ways they were narratively and lexically formulated in medieval literature were based on chronologically closer precedents, such as, perhaps, King Magnús inn Góði's repression, thus validating a deeper look into them in a study on *thegns*.

At their core (if at all truthful, that is) must lie a trope as old as time, of an aristocracy's loss of its former self-rule in a charismatic leader's assault on heterarchy. If sagas can be trusted, King Haraldr's opponents faced the same "exit–voice–loyalty" trilemma as their contemporaries in the "Danelaw" (above, p. 183). In the words of one of the characters in *Egils Saga* – a generally anti-Haraldr text, – he lavishly rewarded and empowered his men (hence, "loyalty")[1632] but pushed from the country (hence, "exit") or reduced to tenants

who finds the story of Haraldr's submission of Upplǫnd a duplet of the historical events under King Óláfr Haraldsson (*cf.* Helle 1993, pp. 152–153, and Pilø 1999, p. 47).

1628 Larrea 2023, §4.3.2 (esp. p. 221).

1629 Snorri Surluson's authorship of *Oláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka* is not doubted. *Heimskringla* has been considered Snorri's work until recently questioned (Cormack 2001; Boulhosa 2005, chap 1; Long 2017, p. 57), but most scholars so far hold to the traditional attribution. *Egils Saga* has long been suspected of common authorship with *Heimskringla* on stylistic grounds, strongly inferred by recent quantitative methods (Porgeirsson 2018).

1630 *Haraldr konungr eignaðisk íwerju fylki óðul ǫll ok allt land, byggt ok óbyggt, ok jafnvel sjóinn ok vǫtnin, ok skyldu allir búendr vera hans leiglendingar, svá þeir, er á mǫrkina ǫrtu, ok saltkarlarnir ok allir veiðimenn, bæði á sjó ok landi, þá váru allir þeir honum lýðskyldir* (*Egils Saga*, chap 4, p. 5 [ll. 4–7]); *Þat hafði álag verit Haralds konungs ins hárfagra, at hann eignaðisk jarðir allar í Nóregi, byggðar ok óbyggðar, ok jafnvel sjóinn ok vǫtnin; skyldu allir hans jarðbyggjendr vera* (*Gísla Saga*, chap 5, p. 17); *…svá at eigi gyldi honum skatt, jafnvel þeir, sem saltit brenndu, svá sem hinir, sem á mǫrkinni yrktu* (Boulhosa 2005, p. 228; my emphasis).

1631 Boulhosa 2005, p. 172.

1632 *Cf.* how in the narrative context *Heimskringla*'s words about King Haraldr's jarls' increased power (above, n. 1627) explain why in Prándheimr, 'many of the ruling class went to see King Haraldr and became his men' (*…sóttu til Haralds konungs margir ríkismenn ok gerðusk hans menn*; *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 6, p. 98).

(i.e. divested as consequence of "voice") those who refused his friendship (*þýðask eigi hann með vináttu*);[1633] and even more eloquently in an authorial exposition:

> Once King Harald had taken over the kingdoms he had recently won, he kept a close watch on the landholders [*lendir menn*] and powerful farmers [*ríkir bœndr*] and everyone else he suspected of being likely to rebel, and gave them the option to enter his service or leave the country, or a third choice of suffering hardship or paying with their lives; some had their arms and legs maimed. [my emphasis][1634]

Those choosing "voice" or "exit", sagas repeat time and again, found themselves outlawed and their properties confiscated. The claim by the semi-legendary progenitor of the Norwegian dynasty laid on *all* odals in the country *at once* could have been a logical development of the same narrative device. It may have intended at a hindsight compressed literary explanation of both the ideologeme of Norway as the odal of his family[1635] and the actual control the Norwegian Crown came to exercise over various lands by the 13th century,[1636] likely spurred by successive forfeitures from unsuccessful bidders for power.[1637] Under King Magnús Hákonarson both merged into a monarchocentric formulaic expression: the king may honour and reward his jarls from his patrimony (ON *fǫðurleifð*) as he sees fit because "the entire country is his property and odal".[1638]

Íslendingasögur present their characters' aversion to co-optation as commitment to their inherited freedom. Odal plays a crucial role here as a metaphysical embodiment of their privilege and liberty. While in *Landnámabók* Geirmundr Heljarskinn chose "exit" because he had "no high status" or "honour" (ON *øngvar sæmðir*) after King Haraldr's appropriation of many Rogalanders' odals (above, p. 285), *Grettis Saga*, where he re-appears as a ruler in Hǫrðaland (present-day Hordaland, South-Western Norway), specifies what the choice of "loyalty" entailed:

> He [= Geirmundr] had no intention of becoming the king's slave, he said, and begging for what he had previously owned himself, but would rather find another place to establish himself. [my emphasis][1639]

1633 *Egils Saga*, chap 6, pp. 6–7 (ll. 27–34).

1634 *Haraldr konungr var mjǫk gjǫrhugall, þá er hann hafði eignazk þau fylki er nýkomin váru í vald hans, um lenda menn ok ríka búendr ok alla þá er honum var grunr á at nǫkkurrar uppreistar var af ván. Þá lét hann hvern gera annat hvárt at gerask hans þjónustumann eða fara af landi á brott, en at þriðja kosti sæta afarkostum eða láta lífit, en sumir váru hamlaðir at hǫndum eða fótum* (*Egils Saga*, chap 4, pp. 4–5 [ll. 32–3]). Some sagas omit "loyalty". *Gísla Saga* narrates that many emigrated ("exit"), including those who resented King Haraldr's tyranny but were not strong enough to challenge it ("voice"; *Gísla Saga*, chap 1, p. 3). Similarly, in *Laxdœla Saga* ("The Saga of the People of Laxardal"), Haraldr's opponents face the choice of demise (consequential of "voice") or flight ("exit"; Boulhosa 2005, pp. 173–178).

1635 See a discussion by Krag 1989; 2002 (a response to Dørum 2001).

1636 Remiss owners of private churches forfeited the church and land to the king (*EGulL* §12, pp. 38–39); kings had the capacity to reward people with odal in reward for hospitality (*EGulL* §270, p. 151); new farms (as opposed to those *at fyrnsku*, i.e. "from the old") on common fallows belonged to the king, appropriating which required royal licence (*EGulL* §145, p. 146; *FrostL*, Indledning §19, p. 125); odal used to pay a *þegngildi* was againbuyable from the king within ten years by the murderer's heirs, unlike all other property, but, one has to conclude, irretrievable thereafter in unredeemed (*LL*, Mannhelgebolken §2:1, I, p. 302); etc.

1637 Bagge 2010, pp. 116–119 (with references). *Landslov* explicitly blames the loss of odals by the well-born (ON *velbornir menn*) on their serving pretenders (*LL*, Kristendomsbolken §3, I, pp. 173–174).

1638 *…þui at hans æign oc oðal er allt landet* (*Hirðskrá* §9 [14], p. 78–80). A precursor to this notion can also be found in the slightly earlier *Konungs Skuggsjá*: *…koningrenn á allt rikit oc sv allt folkit* ('The king owns the entire kingdom as well as all the people in it'; *Skuggsjá*, chap 55, p. 42).

1639 *…kvezk ok eigi nenna at gerask konungsþræll ok biðja þess, er hann átti áðr sjálfr; kvezk heldr mundu leita sér annarra forráða* (*Grettis Saga*, chap 3, p. 6). Noteworthily, in the preceding sentence Geirmundr also

In other words, "loyalty" meant enfeoffment of a previously unconditioned ancestral landed property.[1640] Even if "loyalty" came with gifts, royal friendship had to be reciprocated with, for example, travelling on the king's errands (as below, p. 298): while some scribes styled those performing such a task the king's *thegns*, others wrote of them as the king's *thralls*.[1641] Geirmundr's sentiment of being reduced to servitude was shared by the people of Þrœndalǫg when King Magnús inn Góði retributed their complicity in his father's demise by exiling, fining, or depriving them of their odals,[1642] – conversely, King Hákon inn Góði's restitution of odals was perceived as a restitution of freedom.[1643] The ruler of Heiðmǫrk (present-day Hedmarken, Eastern Norway) Hrœrekr Dagsson (d. 1021), one of the Uppløndic petty kings who initially supported King Óláfr Haraldsson and considered themselves his equals, too, to prevent being stripped of what little power he had had resolved to (eventually unsuccessfully) liberate himself from the king's yoke (ON *þrælkan konungs*).[1644] *Morkinskinna* couched the release of tighter governance off the Norwegians by sons of King Magnús Berfœttr in terms of 'convert[ing] slavery into freedom'.[1645] According to *Heimskringla*, the fallout between King Haraldr inn Hárfagri and the Orcadian jarls on account of killing his son was resolved by the Orcadians submitting all their odals to the king and then 'the jarl became his man and received the lands in fief from the king'.[1646]

The latter statement ought not be taken for a hard-and-fast historical fact because of anachronistic terminology (e.g., ON *lén*), relations rather reminiscent of King Magnús Hákonarson's monarchocentric ideology in *Hirðskrá*, and contradiction with another version of the same events in the same source (above, n. 1621). Rather, they and similar descriptions illustrate the Old Norse–Icelandic authors way of conceptualising the Viking-Age odal. In a society where 'property was not clearly separated from secular authority before the end of the twelfth century' (well-captured in the polysemy of ON *eiga* [lit. to own]),[1647] entering such novel relations could have been seen as deprivation of self-determination and loss of an aristocratic status. Moreover, becoming King Haraldr's "tenant" (ON *leigumaðr*), according

says that fighting King Haraldr to gain "honour" (ON *sæmðir*) was a forlorn endeavour, which may add nuance in *Landnámabók*'s words about "no honour" remaining for Geirmundr in Rogaland.

1640 Skre 1998, pp. 55–56; Matsumoto 2011, pp. 11–16.

1641 *„Þat er satt at segja," kvað hann, „at hér er mikill munr manna: (Þ)ér hafið konung góðan, en hann drengi* [AM, MS 75c fol., *Flateyjarbók* [copies of three of *Kringla*'s 17th-century manuscripts], Stockh. papp. fol. nr. 22, and Stockh. perg. fol. nr. 1 [the latter two derived from AM, MS 54 fol.] read *þræla*; AM, MS 61 fol. reads *þegna*) *illa. (Þ)ér neikvæðið sendiför eina er hann býðr yðr, en hafið þegit áðr af honum vingjafar ok marga sæmiliga hluti, en ek hefi verit hér til engi vinr konungs þessa; hefir hann ok verit óvin minn; telr hann at sakar sé til þess* ("'It is true to say," he said, "that there is here a great difference between people. You have a good king, but he has poor servants. You refuse a mission that he offers you, but you have in the past received from him friendly gifts and many honourable things, while I have been up to now no friend of this king; he has also been my enemy; he reckons that there are reasons for this'; *Færeyinga Saga*, chap 47, pp. 97–98).

1642 *Þrændir váru þá ok ríkir menn, en nú skulu þeir vera þrælar konungs greifa hér í Nóregi* ('The Þrœndir used to be powerful men, but now they are to be the slaves of the king's steward here in Norway'; *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 4, p. 31).

1643 *HáGóHkr*, chap 15, p. 170. A freedom of which sort was implied is hard to say, since the word used – ON *frelsi* – found use in a most broad of contexts, that in modern English, at least, constitute at least two conceptual categories: freedom and liberty (ONP [*s.v.* "frelsi"]).

1644 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 74, p. 103. The Norwegian historian Claus Krag considers King Hrœrekr the only historical Uppløndic ruler of the five mentioned in *Heimskringla* opponents to King Óláfr Haraldsson (see discussion and references by Iversen 2021, p. 32).

1645 *…sneru þeir bræðr svá ánauð til frelsis* (*Morkinskinna*, II, chap 64, p. 71). See the considerations above, n. 1643.

1646 *...gerðisk jarl hans maðr ok tók lǫnd í lén af konungi* (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 96, p. 158; the story re-occurs in chap 100, pp. 167–168).

1647 Iversen and Myking 2019, p. 35.

to *Laxdæla Saga*, severed one from their kin by denying entitlement to portions of *wergild* owed to aggrieved relatives.[1648] As Aron Gurevich, with whom this enquiry began, wrote,

> [...] the word *óðal* referred not only to land but also to the totality of rights that went with that land to its possessor [...] designating the noble birth, the noble provenance of a man, his belonging to a free kin. The qualities of the owners were transferred to the land, which was also regarded as "free", "noble".[1649]

Yet, for the same reason of a confluence between social status and landed proprietorship, for many submission (in some cases nominal) to and co-optation by nascent kingship "must have represented a far lesser evil than the threat of being driven from the farm and land".[1650]

Ultimately, we cannot know for sure if any inroad on the Norwegians' odals and their reversal actually took place in the late 9th – early 10th centuries, nor whether it or something else provoked emigration to Iceland. But we can be certain that, first, in the Viking Age odal used to be a type of hereditary and in idea free of royal encumberment landownership; second, that these qualities translated to its owner's social status; and third, that the trope of "taking odal" – for good to deprive of resource base or to seal a new type of relations – existed in the 1030–1040s at the latest as witnessed by skaldic poetry.

At the end of it, Sigvatr and Arnórr's choice of words does not seem arbitrary, especially if they served the inspiration for a later presentation of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's actions and not the other way around. But by itself, their poetry does not say much about *thegns* deprived of odal as social actors. The potential of the two stanzas does not end here, however, for further analysis and collation addresses this important issue, if again indirectly and with the licence of historical inference.

4.4.2.2 confluence of landed proprietorship and legal status

It has been long noticed that in the pyramid of legal ranks in *Gulaþingslǫg*, ON *óðalborinn* (*maðr*) (lit. odal-born [person]; outside laws, also metaphorically: entitled to by birth right) stands for ON *hǫldr/hauldr/hǫlðr*,[1651] and that *Landslov* later (re-?)defined the *hǫldr* as someone

> [...] who has inherited *óðal* both from their father and mother, those which their parents owned before them, and they are not to count other people's *óðal* among these, those which have been acquired through purchase, or inheritance, or other people's *óðal*.[1652]

If *Egils Saga* was indeed Snorri Sturluson's work (above, n. 1629), this definition must predate *Landslov* by about half a century and must have intended to apply already to the 10th

1648 Boulhosa 2005, p. 174.

1649 Gurevich 1985, pp. 45–46 (pp. 41–42 in the original Russian edition of 1972).

1650 '...må det å komme under kongemaktens overhøyhet ha representert et langt mindre onde enn trusselen om å bli drevet fra gård og grunn' (Røskaft 2003, p. 162).

1651 This is most obvious in the pair *EGulL* §§185 and 200, pp. 67 and 71, respectively: in the former, the social pyramid looks like king–jarl–*lendr maðr*–*óðalborinn maðr*–*bóndi*–freedman–bondsperson, and it is identical with the one in the latter save that *hǫldrmaðr* takes the place of *óðalborinn maðr*; and in the pair *EGulL* §§218 and 243, pp. 74 and 81, respectively: these seem to be chronologically various but in principle similarly organised *wergild* schedules, in which the former enumerates a *mannsgjald* of an *óðalborinn maðr* and the latter portions of a *hǫldsgjald*. Other telling examples are *EGulL* §§149, 224, 239, pp. 59, 76, 80. The evidence does not stop here: *EGulL* §218 states that an *óðalborinn maðr*'s *wergild* is square one to calculate all other *wergilds*, but §180 (p. 67) makes a *hǫldr* one such starting point, as does *FrostL* IV §49, p. 172; X §34, p. 225.

1652 *En sa er haulldr er* [*hann. hefir oðal* [*at erfðum tekit bæðe eptir foður ok moðor* [*þau er þeirra forelldri hafa* [*aðr att ok eigi annara manna oðol i* [*at telia þau er með kaupi ero át komen eða med erfðum eða annarra manna oðol* (*LL*, Landsleiebolken §64, I, p. 842–843; for ease of illustration, 'allodial land' in the translation was changed for "*óðal*").

century. The saga's protagonist married a daughter of Bjǫrn *hǫldr* Brynjólfsson (on him, below, p. 292) and legally claimed for her inheritance, made of landed and movable property, by indicating to the court her odal-born status on all her family sides (*óðalborin í allar ættir*).[1653]

The presence in *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* of the ON adjectival compound *hǫldborinn* (*maðr*) (lit. *hǫldr*-born person) alongside ON *hǫldsmaðr/-kona* (lit. *hǫldr*-[wo]man) suggests that at the point of record, the *hǫldar* constituted a hereditary (ergo aristocratic) and legally privileged (ergo noble) social group, as its members likely perceived a shared communality of their juridically recognised heredity. But other Norwegian laws and the Icelandic *Grágás* indicate that *hǫldr* was (could be?) also a legal rank bestowed upon people not only by birth right: Icelanders enjoyed *hǫldar*'s rights (ON *hǫldsrétt*) in Norway,[1654] as did all town visitors – be they *lendir menn*, be they freed people,[1655] – as did lackland sons of *lendir menn*,[1656] as did king's seneschals (ON *skutilsveinn*), trade ship pilots, goldsmiths, and his other servants when waiting on him at table.[1657]

The *hǫldar* particularly connect to *thegns* with more than one bond. First, as discussed throughout the current section, Norwegian legislators firmly associated the *hǫldar* with odal, the type of landed property some *thegns* were supposedly stripped of by King Magnús inn Góði. Not only that, but just as the legislators responsible for the 960s Andover laws in England considered ordinary for a *thegn* to build a proprietary church/chapel on his bookland, so did one Eyvindr (? b. *c.* 985 AD) commemorate the erection of a church in Oddernes in West Agder (South-Easern Norway) on his odal.[1658] Second, in this instance closely following *Manna Heiti*, Snorri Sturluson took the connexion further by explaining that, at least in poetry, ON *hǫldr*, *þegn*, and *bóndi* were interchangeable (above, n. 1327). *Rígsþula* uses these common nouns as personal names for some of the sons of the supposed progenitor of the free and able householders (above, p. 246). Snorri's observation was not ill-grounded: where in the already quoted stanza 18 of his laudatory poem Markús

1653 *Egils Saga*, chap 57, p. 88 (ll. 10–15). In AM, MS 162 B θ fol., it is said that she was also *lendborin* (lit. land-born; Boulhosa 2005, p. 198), which finds an immediate *hapax legomenon* parallel of Sö 54 set up by three *landburniʀ menn*, another pointer to a wider than just Norwegian studied social situations. It is perhaps worth noting that her maternal *hersir* grandfather, Þórir Hróaldsson, at one point had become the king's *lendr maðr* (*Egils Saga*, chap 25, pp. 34–35 [ll. 35–2]).

1654 *GrgKon*, Baugatal, §248, p. 195, and *EGulL* §200, p. 125, – termless in the former but limited to only three years in the latter.

1655 *BjarL* §47, p. 314.

1656 *EGulL* §200, p. 125.

1657 *FrostL* IV §60, p. 175; *EGulL* §200, p. 125. Because the preceding sentence in the last-cited clause introduced compensations deviating from those inherited from birth (*Nu scolo aller menn taca rett efter feðr sínum. nema þeír einír menn er til annars ero skildír* – 'Now all men shall inherit such [atonement] rights as their fathers had, except those for whom there is a different arrangement'), one must believe that king's seneschals must have normally been recruited from lower strata.

1658 *Eyvindr gerði kirkju þessa, goðsonr Ólafs hins Hála/Halla/Helga, á óðali sínu* ('Eyvindr, godson of Óláfr the Slippery/Crooked/Holy made this church on his allodial land'; N 210). The mention of King Óláfr Haraldsson, assumed from the reference to his sainthood, though commonly accepted (e.g., by Poulsen, Vogt, and Sigurðsson 2019, p. 21), is not linguistically straightforward and was recently discussed by Schulte 2019, pp 272–274. Zachrisson 1994b, p. 223, and 2017, p. 123, accepts the identification of the sponsor with Eyvindr Úrarhorn, 'an important man and from a powerful family' (ON *mikill maðr ok kynstórr*) from East Agder, an ally of Óláfr mentioned in his biographical saga (*ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 62, 66, 86, 98, 102, pp. 82–85, 128, 163, 171), where he, however, is presumed dead before Óláfr. Either the sagas were in error, or these were two homonymous people who lived in close proximity in time and space, and so voices of caution in equating them have been raised, too (Knirk 2021, p. 39).

Skeggjason praised the king for putting to the sword 'an untold number' of *thegns* (above, n. 1309), in stanza 20 he called the king's victims 'an untold number' of *hǫldar*.[1659]

The problem of *hǫldr* in the Scandinavian (more specifically, Norwegian?) society has a long tradition of research.[1660] Though it seemingly concerns a later, medieval period, this scholarship indirectly but nonetheless crucially bears on this chapter's object of study.

4.4.2.3 *hǫldar*: Viking-Age odal-born aristocracy?

For the present purposes, two features about the *hǫldar* are certain and warrant attention.

First, in the written records, *hǫldar* unmistakably exhibit Timothy Reuter's aristocratic traces (above, §1.6.2.2): inherited wealth and social connexions resulting in/from exercise of power.

In contextualised saga literature, ON *hǫldr* figures as a by-name on the thematic-rhematic model "personal name + common noun" (i.e. "X [the] *hǫldr*") common to Germanic languages and used of (occupational) titles, ranks, and offices (*cf.* above, §3.3.9). The same holds true of Anglo-Saxon sources where, strictly speaking, *hǫldar* appear historically first. An unspecified number of *holds* together with (under?) Jarl Þórfreðr submitted to King Edward the Elder in 917 AD in Northamptonshire; a further seven personally named "Danelaw" *holds* were listed by chroniclers among the battle casualties in 903 and 910 AD below kings, jarls, and people with no identifiers. To them must be added Þórbrandr *cognomento Hold* (d. 1024), 'a Danish noble'[1661] whose family probably held the eponymous area of Holderness (lit. Hold's cape)[1662] in East Yorkshire and was caught up in a protracted feud in Northumbria (above, n. 227). In *Egils Saga*, a grandson of a 'powerful *hersir*', 'a man of considerable wealth and power' (*maðr vellauðigr ok stórmenni mikit*) from Sogn (South-Western Norway) by the name of Bjǫrn *hǫldr* Brynjólfsson owned a ship with a crew and 'was a great traveller[1663] and most accomplished man' (*var farmaðr mikill* […] *inn gerviligsti maðr*). He married a daughter of a *hersir*, and his great-grandniece later married into royalty.[1664] According to *Hákonar Saga Herðibreiðs* ("The Saga of King Hákon Herðibreiðr"), among co-kings Eysteinn Haraldsson (r. 1142–1157) and Sigurðr Munnr's top supporters who in 1157 AD proclaimed Hákon king was one Sigurðr (d. 1163), a son of Há(ll)varðr *hǫldr* of Reyrr (present-day Røyr in Hedmarken) and later jarl.[1665] This account re-appears in the *Orkneyinga Saga* ("The Saga of the Orcadians"),[1666] which supplies two further contemporary historical names of

1659 *Heiðin vǫru hjǫrtu lýða hryggðarfull í Vinða byggðum; eldi sveif of ótal haulda; Eirekr brenndi sali þeira* ('The heathen hearts of people were sorrowful in the settlements of the Wends; fire swept around an untold number of freeholders; Eiríkr burned their halls'; Mark *Eirdr* 20).

1660 See overviews and detailed studies by, e.g., Gurevich 2009, pp. 269–289 (first published in 1962 and building on a fundamental examination by Konrad Maurer), and Ugulen 2008, based on the fuller Ugulen 2006. Both will be largely relied upon below as quite exhaustive, if uncritically relying on Wulfstan's *Compilation on Status* among other evidence.

1661 *…Turebrando nobili et Danico uiro* (JW: *s.a.* 1016 AD).

1662 As suggested by Bolton 2009, pp. 117–123, the name was derived from Þórbrandr's titulary by-name. Chances are that toponyms with the same first element left a mark in mainland Scandinavia, but the evidence is ambiguous (Hald 1933, pp. 77–79).

1663 Which coincidentally explains the borrowing OE *hold*: both Bjǫrn and Sumarliði (below) are said to have been involved *í víkingu* (i.e. raiding) – apparently, the Anglo-Saxons closely encountered viking pirate leaders known as the *hǫldar* to their contemporaries.

1664 *Egils Saga*, chaps 33, 40, 41, pp. 44, 55–56.

1665 *Þar váru þá með honum Sigurðr, sonr Hávarðs hǫlds af Reyri* […] *ok mart annarra hǫfðingja ok vina Eysteins konungs ok Sigurðar konungs* ('There were with him there now Hávarðr *hǫldr* (Freeholder) of Reyrr's son Sigurðr [...] and many other leading men and friends of King Eysteinn and King Sigurðr'; *HákHerHkr*, chap 1, p. 347).

1666 *Orkneyinga Saga*, chap 89, p. 237.

hǫldar in modern-day Scotland. One is Þórsteinn *hǫldr* who married a granddaughter of 'a rich and well-born man' (*gǫfugr maðr ok vellauðigr*) from Caithness (North-Eastern Scotland). Þórsteinn's family scored high among the Orcadian power-holders: his maternal uncle was Jarl Óttarr of Thurso, and Þórsteinn's own son Þórbjǫrn Klerkr grew up together with other high-born (*ættstórir*) offspring of co-Jarl Haraldr of Orkney (d. 1131) and whose heritage they all claimed; Þórbjǫrn himself would latter marry a daughter of one jarl and counsel another.[1667] The other was Sumarliði *hǫldr* (*alias* Somairle mac Gille-Bride of Gaelic sources), a Gaelic-Norse chieftain (*hǫfðingi*) who ruled (*hafði ríki*) Argyll (South-Western Scotland), married a daughter of a Hebridean king and died in 1164 AD at the Battle of Renfrew helming a seven-ship raid with a large retinue.[1668] Finally, an addition to *Fagrskinna* has the young Ragna in Ríkuláta, the owner of the Þótn district (ON *byggð*; present-day Toten, South-Eastern Norway), refuse a proposal to marry the young King Haraldr inn Hárfagri, unless he made all Norwegians his *thegns*. Haraldr responded by swearing on his life to do so and remarked that such a woman was fit to be a splendid king's wife, not a *hǫldr*'s of some *herað*.[1669] *Heimskringla*'s version of Haraldr's marital failure differs somewhat: the bride-to-be's name is Gyða, a daughter of a king of Hǫrðaland, and she would agree to marry only a sovereign ruler (ON *þjóðkonungr*) of the calibre of the Danish King Gormr inn Gamli, not a king who ruled no more than a *fylki* (ON *fylkiskonungr*).[1670] The story is patently legendary (Gormr's mention is utterly anachronistic) but worth dwelling on it regardless. Aron Gurevich perspicaciously inferred that *Fagrskinna*'s Haraldr implied himself when he non-terminologically (and probably for the sake of noticeable alliteration, one might add) opposed a "splendid king" (his future self) to a "*hǫlðr* of a *herað*" (his present self). If that were so, "a *hǫldr* of a *herað*" and "a king of a *fylki*" meant roughly the same thing.[1671] In various parts of the Norse-speaking community, ON *herað* could non-terminologically apply to territories of elusive sizes. Perhaps, a "*hǫlðr* of a *herað*" meant a petty chieftain of what modern historians term ON *heraðsríki*.[1672] ONP prefers to unite ON *heraðs hǫldr* into a dithematic compound which further seems to be a *hapax legomenon*. However, the dictionary also hints at a close and better attested synonym, ON *heraðshǫfðingi*, with about the same meaning and alliterative morphology.[1673] It would also neatly connect to the derivation

1667 *Orkneyinga Saga*, chaps 53, 55, 85, 100, pp. 114, 119, 208, 272.

1668 *Orkneyinga Saga*, chaps 100–101, pp. 274–275.

1669 *Þat lét hann auk fylgja, at sú kona var verðari at eiga ágætan konung heldr en einhvern heraðs hǫld, er svá skǫrulig orð hefir í munni sér sem Ragna* ('He added that the woman who had such splendid speech in her mouth as Ragna had was more worthy of marrying an excellent king than some local yeoman'; *Fagrskinna*, Appendix I, chap 3, p. 367). In the historical period, in Norway where the story supposedly took place much earlier, within a legal system a *herað* was 'a lower-level administrative district' 'corresponding roughly to the Anglo-Saxon hundred' and a constituent to a *fylki*, but also 'as a smaller unit of land was used similarly to ODAN. *bygth* (= ON *byggð*)' (Love et al. 2020, pp. 111 [*s.v.* "fylki"], 168 [*s.v.* "hæraþ/hæreth/herað"]).

1670 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 3, pp. 96–97.

1671 Gurevich 2009, pp. 286–287, especially, if as claimed by Ísaksson 2012, pp. 235–285, *Fagrskinna* was too Snorri's work (his authorship of *Heimskringla* has not gone unchallenged, though: see above, n. 1629). *Cf.* Bjǫrn *hǫldr* Brynjólfsson's characterisation as a grandson of a *hersir* and Snorri's words that a ruler of a *herað* is a *hersir*, though Snorri sees one such as a king's appointee (below, n. 1672). Despite the 19th-century understanding of *hersir* as a default ruler of a *herað*, more recent scholarship did not support a linguistic or real administrative connexion between the two and rather regarded it as one of the hereditary titles in Western Norway (Andersen 1977, pp. 278–279).

1672 Jakobsson 2012, pp. 105–106. About the same time as *Fagrskinna*, Snorri Sturluson wrote that 'in a single land there are many' *herǫð* and kings' appointees in them are called *hersar* or *lendir menn* in the Norse tongue (*Skáldskaparmál* 53, p. 80 [l. 3]).

1673 ONP (*s.vv.* "heraðshǫldr" and "heraðshǫfðingi").

by the Eddic *Hyndluljóð* (see VIGNETTE 5) of the *hǫldr*-born, together with four (semi-)legendary royal dynasties and the *hersir*-born (*cf. hersar*'s grandson and son-in-law Bjǫrn *hǫldr* Brynjólfsson, above, p. 292), from the "high-born families of men" (*upp bornar ættir manna*) and "utmost people" (*mest manna*).[1674] Together, these biographies,[1675] the legend about King Haraldr inn Hárfagri, and Eddic allusions unmistakedly point in one and the same direction: in the minds of 13th-century Old Norse–Icelandic writers and their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, a *hǫldr/hold* in the past presupposed a lower-calibre autonomous local petty chieftain involved in a high-family-driven political landscape.

At this point enters the second revealing feature, namely that such of the *hǫldar*'s qualities could have been vestigial or maybe not the sole determinative in the Norwegian social landscape of the time when these Old Norse accounts were being penned.

If, as is likely from syntactical evidence, *hǫldr* used to be a title/office, it was last conferred onto (or seized by; or acknowledged for) Sumarliði, Þórsteinn, and Há(ll)varðr perhaps sometime in the 1120–1130s, by which time or soon afterwards ON *hǫldr* surely had acquired its other social sense introduced above. The extant *c.* 1215×1250 AD redactions of *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* presuppose the division of the South-Eastern Norwegian society into status groups of *lendir menn*, *hǫldar*, two tiers of freed persons, and bondspeople.[1676] A society at which chronological point these stipulations describe cannot be known with certainty, but modern editors carefully admit at least some pre-1150 AD material,[1677] and so ON *hǫldr* could denote a status group in the social hierarchy in Sumarliði, Þórsteinn, and Há(ll)varðr's lifetime. In the gradation of legal ranks in *Frostuþingslǫg* and *Gulaþingslǫg*, the *hǫldar* still stand one step below the *lendir menn* but nevertheless above various strata of the common free, freed, and bondspeople. The numbers of these *hǫldar* are likely greater compared to when historical bearers got singled out by this titulary by-name, but still "hardly were a rather big part" of the population.[1678] Aron Gurevich's alternative reading of *Fagrskinna*'s version of the legend about King Haraldr inn Hárfagri and Ragna explains *hǫldr* as a petty countryside lord that exaggeratedly contrasted a kingly *over*lord. Such juxtaposition, while rhetorical, could better match the *hǫldar*'s otherwise documented numbers and localisation in the same century. In the eight-*fylki* region of Þrœndalǫg, a single *fylki*, divisible into smaller *herǫð* (roughly the scale of a parish each), might not have always counted twelve or even six *hǫldar* to be appointed mandatory co-oath-takers at any given moment of time, and so they could be substituted by the "best *bœndr*" if needed.[1679] That the *hǫldar* were involved in legal proceedings immediately relates back to the discussion of legal *thegnship* in *Provincial Laws* (above, §4.4.1).

The vexed problem is relating these *hǫldar* to other Scandinavian status/social groups. In various sources, *hǫldar* demonstrate formal features that would draw them together with, for example, now the exclusively few *lendir menn, hǫfðingjar*, and/or *hersar*, and now with the more numerous *bœndr*.

1674 *Hyndluljóð* 11, 16, pp. 462, 463.
1675 Ugulen 2006, p. 67, provides two additional personalities.
1676 *BorgL* §§9, 12, Tillegg 14, pp. 136, 190, 194; *EidL* §§48, 50, pp. 52, 54.
1677 Collinson, Landro, and Nilsson 2021, pp. 5–9. A conspicuous indicator is a reference to a rule made by one Bessi who must have lived during the reign of King Óláfr inn Kyrri (*BorgL*, Tillegg 4, p. 184).
1678 Sigurðsson and Riisøy 2011, p. 171.
1679 *FrostL* IV §8, p. 160; XIV §7, p. 251 (reproduced in *LL*, Landsleiebolken, I, §61, p. 830); XV §11, p. 256 (also repeated in *BjarL* §150, p. 331).

Both *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Frostuþingslǫg* explicitly take the *hǫldar*'s *wergilds* as the starting point for all subsequent *wergild* calculations (above, n. 1651). Similarly, both *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* know no other fully free category but the *hǫldar* and the privileged *lendir menn* above them. *Grágás* assigned universal *wergilds* for all free, so the Icelanders' entitlement to the *hǫldar*'s legal protection in Norway, it has been proposed, might be a residue from a period when the Norwegian legal customs did not segregate the free populace either.[1680] Indeed, as already mentioned, Kings Alfred and Æthelred's treaties with the vikings ignore the indigenous multi-tier system of legal ranks and assign all free Anglo-Saxons the highest *wergild* across the board – quite likely as an equation to the Scandinavian single-tier scale.[1681] This would accord with Snorri Sturluson's statement that the *hǫldar* are the *bændr*

> [...] who have full status as regards their lineage and all their legal rights,

– and, as already quoted, with how in poetic language, the *hǫldar* are called *thegns* and *bændr* (above, n. 1327), as well as with the Eddic *Rígsþula*'s metaphoric listing all three as the middle social status group (above, p. 246). These facts, probably together with *Gulaþingslǫg*'s implied and *Landslov*'s articulated equation between a *hǫldr* and a possessor of ancestral odal, has led some to conclude that,

> [...] the *hauldr* was an integral part of Norwegian peasant society [= *bondesamfunnet*], and that he first and foremost was an allodial peasant.[1682]

On the other hand, the same Snorri in the same passage listing the top-to-bottom hierarchy of power figures, placed the *hǫldar* right after the *hersar* and allowed them the same kennings as the *hǫfðingjar*.[1683] Such "promotion" better matches the other Eddic poem to mention the *hǫldar*, *Hyndluljóð* (above, p. 293), as well as extra-legal contexts in which people with the titulary by-name *hǫldar* are called *hǫfðingjar* and *hersar* who also consort jarls and even kings. It further ties in with Markús's praise of a Danish king for burning down *hǫldar*'s (lordly?) halls (ON *salir*) (above, n. 1659), though it could have, of course, been nothing more than a poetic convention. While *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Frostuþingslǫg* relate protective fines for the *lendir menn* and *hǫldar* at the two-to-one ratio, as does *Borgarþingslǫg* in respect of the two groups' funeral payments (ON *legkaup*), *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* levels the latter out, signalling a shorter social gap between the *lendir menn* and *hǫldar*. While Snorri once situated the *hǫldar* and *thegns* in the *bændr* milieu and *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg* apparently use ON *hǫldr* only to denote one's legal entitlements but ON *bóndi* on all other occasions,[1684] *Gulaþingslǫg* and *Frostuþingslǫg* overtly keep the *hǫldar* above all other *bændr*,[1685] just as Snorri did on an-

1680 Boulhosa 2005, pp. 80–81.
1681 Lambert 2018b, pp. 29–35.
1682 Ugulen 2008, p. 147.
1683 *Þar næst eru þeir menn er hǫldar heita. Þat eru búendr þeir er gildir eru *at ættum ok réttum fullum. Þá má svá kenna at kalla þá veitanda fjár ok gætanda ok sætti manna. Þessar kenningar megu ok eiga hǫfðingjar* ('Next to them [the *hersar*] are the men called *holdar* [heroes]. These are yeomen who have full status as regards their lineage and all their legal rights. They may be referred to by calling them payers and keepers of money, and pledges of truce among men. These kennings can also be applied to chieftains'; *Skáldskaparmál* 53, p. 80 [ll. 8–11]).
1684 Gurevich 2009, p. 272.
1685 *EGulL* §200, p. 125, discriminates between the Icelanders and all other foreigners: the former are entitled to the *hǫldar*'s rights, the former to those of the *bændr*. *Frostuþingslǫg* does not use ON *bóndi* to denote a legal rank, but its use is similar to that of *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg*: the three times *Frostuþingslǫg* envisions a want of twelve or six legally eligible *hǫldar*, the legislator allows a substitution from among the "best *bændr*", probably suggesting a still perceived theoretical legal but in practice gradually blurred social gap between the two.

other cited occasion. These facts and the biographies of historical *hǫldar*, in turn, informed Jo Rune Ugulen's rejection of the notion of a *hǫldr* as

> [...] simply a peasant, or an allodial one for that matter [and] the "normal person" in 12th century Norway.

He instead defined a Norwegian *hǫldr* as a 'landowning', 'comparatively high-ranking big-shot'[1686] that was nevertheless succumbing to the winds of social change over high-medieval Norway to judge from increasingly fewer mentions (merely four in *Landslov*, compared to multiple occurrences in earlier *Provincial Laws*, and none at all in kings' opening addresses in law amendments). In an attempt to resolve the observed contradictions Aron Gurevich in his turn had explained them as snapshots reflecting the *hǫldar*'s earliest, middle, and late phases in the social evolution. For him, the *hǫldar* in the documented period were a vestige of a 'pre-feudal society', 'the broad mass of free population, not a specific social category' that eventually evolved into a privileged minority among the rank-and-file *bændr*, whose social standing he saw progressively declining.[1687]

Ugulen's definition complements Gurevich's solution well. Both could benefit from further refinement, though, considering that the early medieval, and especially Viking-Age *bændr* hardly were a one-to-one social equivalent of either the modern-period *bönder/bønder*, or (and even less so) of MODE *peasants*.[1688] Both scholars appear however particularly correct in observing that in the extant legal records, the *hǫldar* make an impression of the bearers and conveyors of the legal tradition (Gurevich) and that a *hǫldr*'s *wergild* as a common denominator in the fine tariff systems indicates the likely party interested in and capable of both drafting and enforcing the legal customs (Ugulen).

Scholarship has long disputed the various settlement data unearthed by archaeologists and collated by colleagues specialising in written sources. In a study focusing on Romerike in Norway, the archaeologist Dagfinn Skre observed a shift in the Viking Age illustrative of changing social conditions. Early sharper division of the four times greater numbers of burial mounds around distinctly central farms and the few that the surrounding minor farms featured morphed into a more even distribution between magnate and subsidiary farms. Skre interprets this transition as a sign of an economic and demographic growth leading to internal and mutually beneficial agricultural colonisation by former manumitted slaves and various dependants, still exploited and controlled by former masters via exacting tribute, imposing obligatory hosting and billeting, and other renders.[1689] The socio-legal divisions in *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg*, supplemented by a superstructure of the *lendir menn*, corresponds exclusively well with this model (*cf.* above, §1.5.2). At its end, this process preconditioned the later early medieval

> [...] transition from manors based on power over land and people to dispersed and scattered property systems supported by income from land rent from tenant-farmers or stewards.[1690]

Nordic burial mounds – an important argument in the scheme above – have been explained as carrying, among other, the function of marking inherited landed property

1686 Ugulen 2008, *passim* (quotations from pp. 149–150).
1687 Gurevich 2009, p. 272 *et passim*. For a different and less unilateral interpretation of the same legal hints already in the 1960s, see Helle 1964, pp. 113–115.
1688 Imsen 2012, p. 194.
1689 Skre 1999.
1690 Poulsen, Vogt, and Sigurðsson 2019, p. 10.

rights by means of symbolically actualising far-reaching ancestral ties. *Heimskringla* divided history into the Age of Burning (ON *brunaǫld*), Age of Mounds (ON *haugsǫld*), and contemporary Christian "present".[1691] In medieval records, "pre-Christian mounds" constituted an important ideological component in the notions of rightful landed proprietorship, essentially signifying possession "from time immemorial".[1692] 'Villages with burial mounds settled in pagan times' (*høghae byr ok af heðnu bygdaer*) were given a special honorary place in the *Väst-* and *Östgötalagen*.[1693] In the same Romerike that Skre studied, hollow mounds were built in the historical period around some medieval magnate farms, sometimes with secondary burials despite a legal prohibition elsewhere.[1694] On a lexical-conceptual level the said notions found expression, amid other vocabulary, in ON *óðal* and associated with it property phenomena. A 14th-century Norwegian document lists six people buried in various mounds, three of whom are said to have owned local land, including the formula ON *áttu at eign ok at óðli*, known from both runic and legal data (see VIGNETTE 5). *Landslov* divided a hoard found in earth in equal thirds between the king, the discoverer, and the person nearest of kin to the odal(-man?) of the burial mound (*er sa nestr a til haugs oðals at telia*), unless the hoard was not legally announced which made the discoverer forfeit his share and entitled the king and burial-mound odal-man (ON *haugsóðalsmaðr*) to partitioning the hoard in two.[1695] In his 1316 AD law amendment concerning disputes arising from sales of odal, King Hákon Magnússon (r. 1299–1319) expressed doubts regarding the feasibility of oral procedure laid out in *Landslov* and recycled from *Gulaþingslǫg*.[1696] It involved "producing a trustworthy enumeration of agnate paternal ancestors to the burial mound and to pagan times" (*greinanðe skilluislægha langfæðga tall till haughs ok till heiðni*) by hereditary odal-born odal-vouchers, and so King Hákon allowed written testimony to stand as well.[1697] Not only *Landslov*'s preceding (re-?)definition of a *hǫldr* as a possessor of inherited on both family lines odals, but also a document from 1446 AD fittingly connects these notions to the *hǫldar*. It reports a purchase of a plot of land from "*hǫldr*-born people who have owned [it] from the burial mound and pagan times" (*hauldbornom monnum sem aat hofdo fra haugh oc heidhni*).[1698] The Gunderup rune stone that commemorated a "good *thegn*" and his wife who lay in the nearby mound[1699] additionally strengthens the tie between the Viking-Age *thegns* and odal-born *hǫldar.*

By the time of the Norwegian *Provincial Laws* and with 'the slowly fading distinction between free and unfree men'[1700] onwards, to the extent of disappearance of various ranks within the rural population (above, n. 1608), the *hǫldar*'s ascribed noble status largely shrank to a mark of honorary inheritance of odal. A legal (re-?)definition in *Landslov* of who counted as a *hǫldr* must be a sure sign that it meant progressively less when land more freely and increasingly circulated on the "market" and society had long been familiar with remunerated royal service.

1691 ÍF XXVI, Prologue, pp. 4–5; *HáGóHkr*, chap 15, p. 170; also discussed by Johansson 2010.
1692 Discussed at length, beside others, by Iversen 2008, pp. 69–74.
1693 Zachrisson 2017, p. 120.
1694 *EGulL* §23, p. 46.
1695 *LL*, Odelsløsningbolken, §16, II, pp. 592–593.
1696 *LL*, Odelsløsningbolken, §8, II, pp. 569–576.
1697 No. 46 in *NGL* III, pp. 120–121.
1698 Quotation from Ugulen 2006, p. 66.
1699 DR 143.
1700 Iversen and Myking 2019, p. 34.

4.4.2.4 *hǫldar* and kingship

We may cautiously surmise that in the Viking Age, ON *hǫldr* used to refer to a prominent aristocratic social category, which, to connect back to *thegns*, in the mythological socio-conceptual outlook of *Rígsþula*'s unknown composer and Snorri Sturluson's pragmatic poetic elucidation, also passed as *thegns*. Its definitive common features were hereditary control over (larger) tracts of land, possibly manifested in the landscape by mounds, and – confluent with it – superiority over people dwelling on those lands. It was likely these magnates (ON *gǫfgir/gildir/ágætir/tignir menn*, *virðinga-/stórmenn*, *stór ætt*, *stórvirki*) who preferred "exit" and fled from their patrimonies (ON *flýja/fyrirláta óðǫl sín*)[1701] to Iceland and whose descendants' odal-born status was nevertheless recognised in Norway.[1702] And it was likely their fellow-*hǫldar* from the top of this group who went for "loyalty" and replenished the cadre of kings' liegemen by notionally surrendering autonomy and odals in return for increased legal protection and unbroken possession or augmentation of inherited landed wealth by kings' grants. This type of relationship may well turn out analogous with the so-called *fief de reprise*: a legal fiction in which one party formally alienated their patrimony (LAT. *allodium*) only to immediately have it handed back by the formal recipient as a conditioned tenure (LAT. *feodum* or similar). In practice, rather than economic, the underlying transaction was ritualistic: a renewal of personal bond between a lord and liegeman.[1703]

A most illustrative case to this effect is that of Þórsteinn Þóruson. *Egils Saga* makes him a son to a 'very wealthy, distinguished and wise of mind' *lendr maðr* and a woman from a *hersir–jarl* lineage, and endows him with 'many kinsmen of high birth' (ON *margir frændr gǫfgir*). With Þórsteinn abroad, upon his father's death his property (ON *bú*) in the Vík and Raumaríki was turned into king's by the king's low-status stewards (ON *ármenn*). Þórsteinn then appeared at King Hákon inn Góði's court in Þrándheimr and provided witnesses to his rightful inheritance. He was then allowed to take his property and "therewith" (ON *þar með*), says the saga, Þórsteinn became the king's *lendr maðr*, 'as his father had been', and/or, to trust *Berudrápa*, the king's *thegn* (above, p. 255). Later on (? 954–961 AD), Hákon commanded Þórsteinn on pain of land forfeiture to collect tribute from Vermaland in retaliation for Þórsteinn's uncle defection to the sons of King Eiríkr Blóðøx in Denmark, and thereby to mend the king's friendship – a most evident case of "loyalty" Hirschman's trilemma.[1704] On the same occasion at the royal court, the saga's main character, Egill, also appealed to King Hákon for his odal-born wife's inheritance previously withheld by King Eiríkr (above, p. 291) in course of a long feud. Because of this confrontation, Egill was denied both his wife's heirdom and the complementary "retainership and service" (ON *fylgð ok þjónusta*) that he was offering, and with that king's lordship as well.[1705] Instead Egill was encouraged to take his father's inheritance in Iceland and given safe passage – an equally demonstrative case of "exit". Þórsteinn's father's existence is not corroborated by other

1701 Boulhosa 2005, p. 172.

1702 *GrgKon*, Baugatal, §248, p. 195. It cannot be known with certainty if the so-called *Óláfslǫg*, preserved in one of the redactions *Grágás* and purportedly written down in 1083 AD, accurately represents the actual negotiated terms of *c.* 1018×1022 AD. The Icelanders' *hǫldar*'s rights in Norway could thus be a later retrospect (Boulhosa 2005, chap 2; Long 2017, chap 4).

1703 In English, see an overview based on Southern French material of the 11th–12th century by Cheyette 1999. My gratitude belongs to Lars Hermanson for alerting me about this phenomenon.

1704 *Egils Saga*, chaps 64–65, 72, pp. 114–116, 130.

1705 *Konungr segir: 'Ekki muntu, Egill, gerask mér handgenginn…'* ("'You will not, Egill, become my liegeman' said the king..."; *Egils Saga*, chap 65, p. 116 [l. 11]).

sources, nor does the saga specify just whose *lendr maðr* he was. If these events and their causal relations are veracious, *Egils Saga* reported a case quite like a *fief de reprise*. While this property relationship is best exemplified by continental high medieval specimens, there had existed close political analogues (*cf.* GER. *Herrenfall*, lit. succession to a [feudal] lord) contemporaneous with the period under examination. For instance, in 1013 AD the Polish duke Bolesław Chrobry (r. 992–1025) performed homage to the German King (later emperor) Henry II (r. 1004–1024) and received 'a long-desired benefice' (LAT. *benefitium diu desideratum*); a Bohemian duke Wlodowej submitted himself to Henry a was remunerated with 'that which he sought from him as benefice' (LAT. *in beneficium acquisivit*); in 952 AD, the Italian King Berengar (r. 950–961)

> [...] gave himself and his son Adalbert completely into the service (LAT. *vassalicium*) and power of the king [= Emperor Otto I] and he received back Italy to rule through the grace and gift of the king.[1706]

Alternatively, King Hákon may have taken advantage of an autonomous local chieftain to manipulate him into royal lordship under the pretence of his father's made-up commendation. The third option may be that Þórsteinn's skaldicaly confirmed fact of being a king's liegeman was re-thought by the author of the saga for the purposes of a narrative contrast to Egill's succession failure.

Egils Saga further exemplarily – and even more concisely – captured the two career paths – "exit" and "loyalty" – in the biographies of the Brynjólfssynir from Sogn. Bjǫrn abstained from submitting to the king (probably Haraldr inn Hárfagri with whom he had previous hostile encounter *in absentia*) and thus came to be called Bjǫrn *hǫldr* (above, p. 292). His brother Þórðr, conversely, became the king's liegeman (ON *handgenginn*) and a *lendr maðr*. In the composition of the saga, the two episodes follow immediately each other. Their language and terminology are identical and therefore appear to be an obvious narrative contrast in the lives of the two brothers from the Norwegian 10th-century top society (probably in at least three generations, given the saga's willingness to name their father and grandfather). Other pieces, too, evince the same. As already mentioned, *Gulaþingslǫg* prescribes *hǫldar*'s rights for landless sons of the *lendir menn*, and the ON verb *at fá* (lit. to receive) used in this clause[1707] implies a lack of landed benefice from the king and, hence, the *lendir menn*'s recruitment from among the *hǫldar*. A similar inference follows from a (semi-legendary?) note in *Heimskringla* and the *Orkneyinga Saga* that one Hallaðr, appointed by King Haraldr inn Hárfagri to rule as Jarl of Orkney and himself a son of Jarl of Mœri (present-day Møre, coastal Central Norway), unable to withstand viking raids and reprimanded by the *bœndr*, gave up his title, returned to Norway, and "took *hǫldar*'s rights".[1708]

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To fit the picture of Viking-Age Scandinavian *thegns* as landed proprietors that pans out throughout the historical §4.4.2 onto the Venn diagram in the conceptual map of this book (Figure 1), the said picture matches the philological conclusions in §4.3.1. Specifically, it

1706 Roach 2012, pp. 361–362, 376–377, 371. Note, however, that in the latter case, as indicated by the author, other accounts of this event also exist.

1707 …*ef hann fær eigi lond* ('...if he is not endowed with land'; *EGulL* §200, p. 125).

1708 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 27, p. 127; *Orkneyinga Saga*, chap 5, p. 10. Two interpretations, not necessarily contradictory, invite themselves: the authors either emphasised Hallaðr's opting out from royal service (as with Bjǫrn Brynjólfsson in *Egils Saga*), or contrasted the social distance between a jarl and a *hǫldr* (as potentially in the story of Ragna in *Fagrskinna* – above, p. 294).

aligns with how in specific situations, ON *þegn* seems to denote people at the intersection between a political elite and autonomous lay social aristocracy. By associating *thegns* with odal landed proprietorship, otherwise characteristic of a social group of *hǫldar*, Sigvatr and Arnórr's stanzas strengthen this argument. While exact juridical details elude modern reconstructions, inference from later sources suggests that the Viking-Age *thegns*' landed property used to be of the hereditary, allodial (i.e. non-feudal), and aristocratic type that formed a strong bond with and conditioned their non-segmented social and political power. With transition to Christianity, such characters, quite as in England, strengthened their position in the social hierarchy by building proprietary churches, as, for example, did one Eyvindr from Oddernes on his odal (above, p. 291). Encroachment on odal was perceived as reduction to slavery, though such phrasing may in fact proceed from a conflation in Old Norse of what modern vocabulary subtly distinguishes as freedom and liberty. Given what can be retrospectively known about it in the period under examination, Scandinavian *thegnly* odal landed proprietorship hardly followed from royal service, contrary to Klavs Randsborg's thesis. By contrast, it and its encumber-free nature were the cornerstones of *thegns*' social station.

It ought to be borne in mind that ON *þegn* and *hǫldr* obviously were not fully coterminous, for as this chapter shows, the former probably appears semantically wider and rather coterminous with ON *bóndi*. Further, ON *hǫldr* does function as a title, which ON *þegn* does not. But inasmuch as the *hǫldar* were a top stratum of the *bændr*, so were the *thegns*. Effectively, the Viking-Age odal-owning *thegns* appear as smaller-calibre local lords one or several levels below some seventy-eighty chieftains conjured for the start of the Viking Age,[1709] or Mosca's middle tier between the upper ruling elite and the ruled masses (above, p. 26). These qualities were succinctly captured by Snorri Sturluson in the two cited quotes from his *Prose Edda*: a *thegn* is he who can otherwise be known as a *hǫldr* (confirmed by Markús Skeggjason's alteration between the two), i.e. someone of a legally privileged status group among the *bændr* thanks to a high birth (above, n. 1683). This characteristic neatly matches Sigvatr's alternative skaldic appellation of the odal-owning victims of King Magnús inn Góði's vindictiveness: *búendr gofgir*, paraphrased in *Morkinskinna*'s prose context as *margir gofgir menn* (below, n. 1913).

4.4.3 Kings and Thegns: *From Co-Optation to Mutual Rights and Obligations*

Question 2 on the research question list presupposes positioning *thegns* in the socio-political order of the "second Viking Age" beyond landed wealth and legal standing covered in the two preceding sections alone. Skipping over the hard-and-fast geographical aspects from the list of sub-questions, the study will now turn to remaining one of power dynamics. Over the period, the aforementioned order was being progressively, though at various pace, invaded by nascent kingship in the consolidating Scandinavian polities (see the lapidary sketch above, §1.5.2). Hence the said positioning largely addresses the question of the relationship between kings and *thegns*, which, to reiterate, was the initial point of issue between Svend Aakjær and Karl Martin Nielsen.

1709 Sigurðsson and Riisøy 2011, p. 31, allow for some twenty major and between fifty and sixty smaller chieftain halls (at p. 62 equated with chieftaincies) in Norway in the first half of the 800s.

The task may stall at first, insofar as very few if any individuals in Old Norse sources act in specifically *thegnly* capacities. To best accomplish the objective, it is suggested in this instance to approach it onomasiologically, as context analysis will shortly ground potentially more than one name for the (topper strata of the?) category of aristocratic landed proprietors discussed in the foregoing section.[1710]

Even so, our texts are less of impartial "histories" and more of later "historical reconstructions" from oral tradition and written testimonies.[1711] Certain anachronisms and probable literary inventions will be pointed out later in this section, but individual and unique details often cannot be cross-checked and neither can their belonging to the narrative period. Accordingly, the relationship between the elites and kingship during the Viking Age as presented in sagas and synoptic histories is a difficult problem. It may have consciously (or less so) in some (greater or lesser) part recycled the realities at the time of writing, as first argued by Halvdan Koht long ago (*cf.* above, p. 286).

A possible counterbalance may lie in these sources' greater interest for royal biographies over, contrary to some pre-Weibullian scholarship, a "grand narrative" of the Norwegian unilateral state formation, ostensibly helmed by the Ynglingar–Hárfagri and born out of clashes between organised and motivated social and political groups. A viable sketch of the aforementioned relationship may be in finding potential, if perhaps superficial, regularities, trends in dynamics and independent commonalities, particularly when extrinsic to the overall plot and especially when comparable to similar historical dynamics elsewhere. Accordingly, §4.4.3 exculpates itself with a historiographical precedent in treading as discreetly as possible between radical source-critical relativism and too eager source-uncritical trustfulness.[1712] Worth re-stating, it does not aspire beyond a feasible approximation only.

4.4.3.1 discovering Nordic Viking-Age *thegns* in written sources

In Old Norse literature, the few and far between people expressly termed *thegns* or said to have been of *thegnship* attract such qualifications as a matter of praise and commendation (see above, §§4.3.1.5–6). The individual qualities or their combinations listed in Table 5 as indicative of "good" *thegns* can be found in many Nordic saga characters not emphatically referred to as *thegns*. Enquiring into the reason of such selectivity may be left for separate research. Suffice it to say that should one nonetheless consider them all *thegns*, beside a gargantuan task of putting it together, the end putative catalogue will more than likely turn out overly inclusive, so as to dilute ON *þegn*'s heuristic value as a social marker.

A hopefully more meaningful identification of individual and groups of *thegns* in Old Norse texts may instead proceed from *in*ductively singling out formal lexical and unifying social features common to more than only individuals explicitly called ON *þegnar*. Such approach should then enable studying this widened social category at the expense of *de*ductive reasoning. With due allowances, §§4.3.1.2 and 4.4.1 suggest that such principal features include:

1710 See above, n. 165, and especially Knut Helle's work.

1711 Source-critical studies reviewing and comparing the agendas of the sources in question are many: see, e.g., Andersson 1994; 2012, chap 5; Fjalldal 2013; Bagge 2016; Orning 2020, to barely scratch the surface.

1712 Bagge 1991, though critically met by Sawyer 2015, – see references to the two authors' previous variances on the matter in Orning 2020, p. 118 (n. 13); Bagge 2002; Tveito 2013; Orning 2014 (a part of a longer discussion with Sverre Bagge; reviewed by Sukhino-Khomenko 2020a); Kolberg 2019, pp. 95–140; Bolton 2022, to name a few.

1. on the lexical level: (partial) contextual synonymity between ON *þegn* and *bóndi*;
2. on the socio-political level: aristocratic status fused with and bound on hereditary control of allodial land, forceful encumberment of which turns its odal- or *hǫldr*-born proprietors into either the kings' (at least notionally) enfeoffed subordinates (ON *lendir menn*) or persecuted adversaries.

Scandinavian *thegns* belong here more than out of deductive reasoning and colligations. In a relationship towards the king, only the acceptance of his personal lordship socio-legally and politically meaningfully tells a *lendr maðr* from a (*hǫldr*-born) *bóndi*, as the use of ON *bóndi*/*hǫldr* as an occupational by-name reveals (above, p. 292). Two sources directly and one indirectly speak to how this acceptance made the inferior party also a king's *thegn*.

One – *Berudrápa* – has already been briefly discussed. To re-cap, an enfeoffed *lendr maðr* of King Hákon Goði by the name of Þórsteinn Þóruson explicitly got to be called a king's *thegn* by the poet Egill Skallagrímsson (above, pp. 255 and p. 298). The other is an anecdotal exchange of embassies between King Æthelstan and the then elderly King Haraldr inn Hárfagri. In *Heimskringla*, Æthelstan sent Haraldr a gilded sword as a diplomatic gift. The moment Haraldr touched the hilt, the messenger declared him Æthelstan's *thegn*,[1713] which sounds temptingly close to the like custom from which *heriot* must have been emerging at roughly the same time (above, p. 147). Haraldr, who 'was not willing to become any man's' *thegn*, flew into a rage and to avoid humiliation sent to Æthelstan his infant son Hákon to be fostered. The slightly earlier version of *Fagrskinna* is nearly identical, save that it adds that by laying his hand on the sword, Haraldr also became Æthelstan's *sverðtakari* (lit. sword-taker).[1714] Weapon's ritualistic symbolism in the martialised Scandinavian society goes beyond doubt.[1715] A few skaldic stanzas show that Viking-Age kings would occasionally grant swords to their inferiors,[1716] so prose descriptions of similar gifts[1717] do not in and of themselves stretch the boundaries of the probable, even if impossible to corroborate. But on the whole, this episode probably did not relate an actual historical fact and was rather devised for the needs of the plot. In the available corpus, ON *sverðtakari* as a term for a Nordic king's liegeman was first applied to the supporters of King Sigurðr Slembidjákn in 1136 AD, although this is only according to *Fagrskinna*'s testimony a century later.[1718] The ritual described above seems to first re-appear in vernacular historical record in *Sverris Saga*, supposedly *s.a.* 1177 AD.[1719] Thereafter ON *sverðtakari* figures prominently in *Hirðskrá*'s terminology of the mid-late 13th-century royal *hirð*, all members of which except *kertisveinar* (lit. candle servants) were considered the Norwegian king's sword-takers.[1720] For a *Hirðskrá*'s jarl, receiving a sword was specifically a sign of delegated power. *Heimskringla*'s description of such investiture of a petty king of Naumudalr (present-day Namdalen in

1713 *„Nú tóktu svá sem várr konungr vildi ok nú skaltu vera þegn hans, er þú tókt við sverði hans."* ("'Now you have accepted it as our king wished, and now you shall be his *thegn*, since you have received his sword'"; *HaHáFgrHkr*, chap 38, p. 144). To retain the illustrative nature of the quote, I allowed myself to tamper with Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes's translation and swap 'subject' for "*thegn*".

1714 *Fagrskinna*, chap 4, pp. 71–72. The episode also re-appears in *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta*.

1715 Riisøy 2021.

1716 Sigv Lv 3; Sigv *Vestv* 5; Bersi Lv; Brúlf Lv; Hfr Lv 11.

1717 E.g., *Morkinskinna*, I, chaps 16, 83, pp. 126, 144 (reproduced in *MaGóHkr*, chap 23, p. 98); *Áns Saga*, chap 1, p. 368; *Laxdœla Saga*, chap 43, pp. 131–132.

1718 *Fagrskinna*, chap 96, p. 330.

1719 *Gengu menn þá til handa honum* (= *Sverri*) *ok tóku við sverði hans* ('They [...] swore fealty to him [= King Sverrir], laying their hands on his sword'; *Sverris Saga*, chap 11, pp. 18–19).

1720 *Hirðskrá* §§6 (11), 7 (12), 11 (16), 15 (20), 22 (27), 45 (47), pp. 72, 74, 82, 90, 108.

Trøndelag) by King Haraldr inn Hárfagri and of Sveinn Ástríðarson by King Magnús inn Góði as jarls follows closely *Hirðskrá*'s description.[1721] These literary episodes and *Hirðskrá*'s assertion that "in the olden days" king liegemen (ON *handgengnir menn*) and *sverðtakarar* were called "housecarls"[1722] may suggest that *Hirðskrá* in fact built on and codified an earlier pre-existing concept of entering king's lordship with the touch or reception of his sword.[1723] The gesture itself must have been a semiotic shift in the skaldically attested gift-giving of swords. In any case, these instances should corroborate the collected items in §4.3.2.1 that joining a Scandinavian (Norwegian, at any rate) king's *comitatus* of the Mitteisian sort involved notionally becoming his *thegn*. This probably encouraged the author of the third relevant source, *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar en Mesta*, to conjure up Járn-Skeggi's machinachion to trick King Óláfr Tryggvason to touch Þórr's chariot that would, in the *Erfahrungsraum* of the supposedly present *bændr* and surely the minds of readers, make Óláfr the god's *thegn* (above, p. 264). On this interpretation, King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's semi-legendary oath to make all Norwegians his *thegns* (above, p. 293, and below, p. 322) becomes rather more nuanced than at first glance. Crucially, it offers purported mechanics of Haraldr's conquest and moreover, it ties in with his suggested encroachment on the Norwegians' odals (above, §4.4.2.1). A tempting, even if unprovable, proposition to entertain is that these ideas found an indirect and possibly unreflected upon much later literary expression in a 14th-century *fornaldarsaga* in which Þegn is the name of a sword that a petty king of Naumudalr presented to his retainer (ON *hirðmaðr*) that subsequentely became the man's heirloom.[1724]

In the absence at the moment of writing of a single, all-encompassing, and all-inclusive digital Old Norse linguistic corpus or PASE's database counterpart, Viking-Age actors that fit the itemised above social and linguistic criteria will be sought manually with the help of narrow reading of prose texts covering this period. Occasional resort will be made to further texts entered in ONP that add to the lexicographical observations. In consequence of this methodology, the achieved outcome below cannot aspire to exhaustiveness. Hans Jacob Orning's methodological approach to sagas as a source for political history 'not to find out what did actually happen, but what *could* have happened' (italics in the original) also addresses the inherent problem of the time gap separating the written sources and the narrated events.[1725] As discussed above (pp. 33–34), the emerging picture is less a faithful reflection of what Scandinavian *thegns* did and more an approximation of what they could have done.

4.4.3.2 probable "aliases" for *thegns* in written sources

With some trust in deductive argumentation and in the earlier discussion on recruiting (at least part of) the odal-born *hǫldar* into a narrower cadre of *lendir menn*, one may carefully

1721 *HaHáFgrHkr*, chap 8, p. 100; *MaGóHkr*, chap 23, pp. 37–38.

1722 This notion is shared with Snorri Sturluson: *Húskarlar konunga váru mjǫk hirðmenn kallaðir í fornesk<j>u* ('*Hirdmenn* were generally referred to as kings' housecarls in ancient times'; *Skáldskaparmál* 53, 80 [l. 15]).

1723 That ON *sverðtakari* could have linguistically existed in the Viking Age is borne out by the presence of other suffixed *-ari nomina agentis* formations in some runic inscriptions (Bandle et al. 2002, chap IX:84, p. 749). On the other hand, ON formations such as *hempegi* and *arfþegi* (lit. inheritance-taker) may be indicative of ON *sverðtakari*'s late(r) origin. Housecarls also figure in some Swedish runic inscriptions: Sö 338, U 330, U 335.

1724 *Áns Saga*, chap 1, p. 368. One may also remember a kingly lament at Aron Hjǫrleifsson.

1725 Orning 2008, p. 290 (italics in the original).

suppose parity with other native lexemes used to designate these strata. Frequent collective expressions that pair ON *lendir menn* to *ríkir bændr*,[1726] *stórbændr*,[1727] (*aðrir*) *ríkismenn* (lit. [other] men of power, rulers),[1728] and *høfðingjar*[1729] are illustrative of this. The latter noun introduces another row of similar appositions to ON *ríkir bændr*,[1730] *stórmenn*,[1731] *ríkismenn* and *ríkir menn* (lit. powerful people),[1732] and (*aðrir*) *stórbændr*.[1733] The latter two can form a pair on their own too.[1734] ON *ríkir menn* can also go together with ON *ríkir/beztir bændr*[1735] and *gǫfugmenni* (lit. estimable, high-born person).[1736]

The only stable property in this nomenclature is the second place ON *ok stór-/ríkir/beztir bændr* consistently takes in nominal pairs, implying greater numbers of such "great/powerful/best *bændr*". Texts otherwise exhibit considerable lexical interchangeability. Versatility such as this speaks in support of David Crouch and Sverre Bagge's thesis on medieval practical views on society as networks of varying individual personal statuses rather than as a comprehensive hierarchy of discrete groups (above, p. 28). *Fagrskinna* calls Þrœndalǫg's leaders not known to have submitted to any king ON *lendir menn*[1737] and uses this collocation evidentially synonymously with ON *ríkismenn*.[1738] This is probably a geographically tailored reflection of the Old Norse use at the time of writing, because *Íslendingasögur*, too, introduce certain Viking-Age (regardless of an exact date) Norwegian chieftains as *lendir menn* without any identification of their liege-lords.[1739] Generic ON *høfðingjar* often stands for "leaders" or "chief(tain)s" of any sort, and so it can assume synonymity with ON *lendir menn*[1740] or stand in

1726 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 74, 162, 181, 216 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 213, pp. 557–558 [ll. 18–11]), pp. 104, 297, 328, 370; *Fagrskinna*, chap 86, p. 315 (reproduced non-verbatim in *MaSonHkr*, chap 1, p. 238); *MaGóHkr*, chap 19, p. 33; *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 60, p. 30; *Egils Saga*, chaps 4, 11, pp. 4–5 (ll. 32–3), 13 (l. 29); *Grettis Saga*, chap 19, p. 61.

1727 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 171, pp. 306–307.

1728 *Morkinskinna,* II, chap 65, p. 72.

1729 *Morkinskinna,* I, chap 38, p. 211; *Geitarlauf*, chap 1, p. 196 (a 13th-century translation of the Breton *Chevrefoil*; published by Cook and Tveitane 1979).

1730 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 65, p. 315; *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, chap 128, p. 184 (ll. 18–19).

1731 *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 28 of the Stockh. perg. 4° nr. 18 redaction, p. 223.

1732 *Íslendingabók*, chap 8, p. 19; *BarJosSg*, chap 29, p. 20; *Stjórn*, II, p. 1016 (l. 16; does not find a one-to-one equivalent in III Regum 4:21); *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chaps 11, 28, 38, p. 158, 215, 262, – all from the AM, MS 310 4° redaction; *ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 105, p. 240; *Knýtlinga Saga*, chap 70, p. *212*.

1733 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 67, 68 (syntactically detached within the sentence), pp. 315, 317.

1734 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 105, p. 176 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 92, p. 259); *Skáldskaparmál* 65, p. 106 (ll. 2–5).

1735 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 130, p. 222; *Fagrskinna*, chap 127, p. 361, – both times syntactically detached within the sentence. Noteworthily, the context is generally the same on both occasions.

1736 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 90, p. 130.

1737 *Fagrskinna*, chap 22, p. 131.

1738 *Fagrskinna*, chap 31, p. 182.

1739 Þórfinnr Kársson who lived around the turn of the millennium on the isle of Háramarsey (present-day Haramsøya, coastal Central Norway; *Grettis Saga*, chap 18, p. 56); Herjólfr (patronymic not recorded) who lived in the reign of King Hákon inn Góði (*Laxdæla Saga*, chap 7, p. 15); Ǫlvir Hvíti Ósvaldsson who lived during King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's reign (*Þorsteins Saga Hvíta*, chap 1, p. 3; *Vápnfirðinga Saga*, chap 1, p. 23; *Landnámabók*, p. 291); Eiríkr Alspakr east of the Vík, the father of Þórsteinn Þóruson, and Friðgeirr of Blindheimr (*Egils Saga*, chaps 64, 66, pp. 114 [l. 12], 116 [l. 34]) who supposedly lived in the second half of the 10th century, – although in view terminological consistency in *Egils Saga*, perhaps, we simply do not know enough of their background that allowed the author to categorise them as *lendir menn*.

1740 *Þá talaði Erlingr skakki, leitaði, ef þat væri ráð høfðingja eða annarra lendra manna, at tekinn væri til konungs sonr Símunar skálps, dóttursonr Haralds konungs gilla, en Jón Hallkelsson byndisk fyrir flokkinn* ('Now Erlingr skakki spoke, enquiring whether it was the opinion of leaders or other landed men that King Haraldr gilli's daughter's son, Símun skálpr's son, should be taken as king, and that Jón Hallkelsson should take on the leadership of their company'; *MaErlHkr*, chap 1, p. 373).

for ON *lendir menn ok ríkir bændr*.[1741] Individual appositions of ON *høfðingjar/lendir menn/ríkismenn* to ON *stór-/ríkir bændr*, sometimes under the umbrella of ON *góðir menn*,[1742] occasionally drop ON *stór-* and *ríkir* before ON *bændr*[1743] (or even both altogether when copied)[1744] as, apparently, contextually self-explanatory. Some texts use ON *ríkir menn* and adjectivally non-qualified ON *bændr* within one and the same sentence,[1745] probably on account of ON *maðr*'s wide semantic range and ON *ríkr*'s contextual redundancy before ON *bændr*. Some allow the same interchangeability between ON *stórmenni* and *ríkismenn*.[1746] Some contrast ON *lendir menn* and adjectivally non-qualified *bændr*,[1747] but others explicitly equate ON *lendir menn ok ríkir bændr* to ON *ríkismenn* by a prefacing ON *bæði* (lit. both).[1748]

That being said, a semblance of leastwise a notional conceptual order within such versatile socio-political nomenclature is vaguely discernible (Figure 7). ON *høfðingjar*, *ríkis-/ríkir menn*, *stórmenn*, *lendir menn*, and *gǫfgir menn* demonstrate enough inclusive semantical potential to cover all Nordic (often Norwegian, but occasionally otherwise, too) lay elite, as they *may* occur as a lone self-standing first element in the "elite *vs* rank-and-file" descriptions.[1749] By

1741 In *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 55 of the AM, MS 310 4° redaction, p. 279 (effectively covering the same events as in *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 67, p. 315, and *ÓlTrMest*, I, chap 166, p. 373), the actors get to be called ON *lendir menn ok ríkir bændr* but ON *høfðingjar ríkir* only a few paragraphs above.

1742 Both Kings Cnut and Óláfr Haraldsson are said to have taken hostages from among (sons) of the *lendir menn*, (*stór*)*bændr*, and *beztir menn* (*ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 75, 111, 121, 171, pp. 108, 182, 208, 306–307), to a detrimental effect for Óláfr. His holding of 'the sons of good men' (*góðra manna synir*) hostages was used as a pretext for the rebellion that led to his mortal defeat at Stiklastaðir (*Ágrip*, chap 31, p. 42). In his punitive raid in Hálogaland against customary believers, Óláfr also took many *ríkismenn* prisoners (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 109, p. 181).

1743 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 10, p. 104; *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 46 of the Stockh. perg. 4° nr. 18 redaction, p. 279; *HaSigHkr*, chap 44, p. 126; *MaErlHkr*, chap 36, p. 411; *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 46, 75, 216 pp. 58, 105–108, 370.

1744 *Sverris Saga*, chap 15, p. 25. Where *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 45, p. 58 reads *fóru þaðan lendir menn margir* ('...from there [= Heiðmǫrk] many landed men came'), *ÓlHlSer*, chap 39, p. 87, had *foro þaðan lendir menn margir, oc rikir bøndr* ("from there many landed men and powerful *bændr* came").

1745 *Ok hvar sem hann stefndi í landinu þing ok sǫfnuðusk saman r í k i r m e n n ok ætluðu at mæla í moti honum, — ok mátti þar heyra talat mart snjallt ørendi, — ok þó at b æ n d r talaði snjallt, þá brásk þó þat yfir jafnan er konungr talaði, því at hann hafði sannendi at mæla…* ('Wherever in the country he convened an assembly and p o w e r f u l m e n gathered with a mind to oppose him, there you could hear many an eloquent speech delivered. And even though the f a r m e r s spoke eloquently, they were always outdone when the king spoke because he had the truth on his side'; *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 55 of the AM, MS 310 4° redaction, p. 277; my emphasis).

1746 *Konungr hafði lið mikit ok valit svá mjǫk, at honum fylgði alt s t ó r m e n n i , þat er hann mátti ná, ok hverr r í k i s m a n n a hafði með sér valit lið, bæði at ættum ok þat er gerviligast var* ('The king had a great following, and it was so choice that all the m e n o f r a n k hat he could get hold of went with him, and each of the p o w e r f u l m e n was accompanied by a choice troop, both as regards descent and those who were most accomplished'; *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 87, p. 129; my emphasis).

1747 *…svá var í hverju fylki sem lendir menn réði fyrir bóndaliðinu* ('...it was in every district as if the landed men ruled over the class of farmers'; *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 46, p. 58; recycled in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 39, p. 88, with a swap of ON *bóndalið* for *bóndamúgr*).

1748 *MaSonHkr*, chap 1, p. 238.

1749 Unlike in Old English (above, §3.3.11.1), such oppositions exhibit more literary than mnemonic oral features: they do not alliterate or rhyme and can be syntactically detached within a sentence or paragraph. Some examples include but may not be limited to: ON (*land*)*høfðingjar* and *alþýða/allr lýðr/smámenn* (*Ágrip*, chap 58, p. 51, *MaGóHkr*, chap 23, p. 37, *Fagrskinna*, chap 58, p. 274, *Kristnitakan*, chap 2, p. 172, *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chaps 18 of the Stockh. perg. 4° nr. 18 redaction, p. 194; chap 20 of the AM, MS 310 4° redaction, p. 204); ON *ríkismenn/stórmenn/lendir menn/gǫfgir menn* and *alþýða* (*HáGóHkr*, chap 13, p. 166, *ÓlHlSer*, Prologue, p. 4 [ll. 5–6], *ÓlTrMest*, II, chap 261, p. 301, *Sverris Saga*, chap 3, p. 6; *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 20 of the Stockh. perg. 4° nr. 18 redaction, p. 204, *MaGóHkr*, chap 25, p. 40, and *MaSonHkr*, chap 17, p. 256; *Egils Saga*, chap 57, p. 90 [ll. 8–9]; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 47, p. 291, respectively); ON *ríkismenn* and *allr lýðr* (*PétSgPost II*, chap 29, p. 194); ON *ríkir menn* and *smámenn* (*Morkinskinna*, II, chap 60, p. 32); ON *stórmenn* and *allr múgr* (*Silvesters Saga*, chap 13, pp. 258–259).

contrast, ON *stór-/ríkir/beztir bændr* does not, signalling its semantic deficiency. Beside the generic headmen–*høfðingjar*, *ríkis-/ríkir menn* acts like another catch-all term, for people thus called can practically and, as said, lexically-syntactically behave both as ON *lendir menn* and *stór-/ríkir/beztir bændr*, depending on context. But whereas ON *ríkir menn* can equally stand for ON *ríkismenn*,[1750] the opposite does not seem to be the case. *Íslendindasögur* always use ON *ríkismenn* somehow in a foreign context,[1751] whereas ON *ríkir menn* is not tailored this way and can apply to individual Icelanders too. The key must lie in the idea advanced by certain authors that in the best of worlds, *ríkis-* and *lendir menn* ought to have been descended from titled power-holders.[1752]

Certain cases demonstrate that, despite it and according to the same authors, by the early 11th century at the latest, the socio-political elite in mainland Scandinavian was a blend of wilful and self-interested lords. They appear homogeneous in practical matters but heterogenous in origins. Nothing but an uneven ancestry seems to meaningfully distinguish Sigurðr Sýr (d. *c.* 1018), who personally supervised his field workers, while being supposedly King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's great-grandson, and held a reception for the king of all Norway,[1753] from one Úlfr Augði (lit. the rich), probably a *ríkr maðr* among the Uppløndic *bændr*,[1754] who owned fourteen or fifteen farms while being supposedly a grandson of a *thrall* but similarly received the Norwegian high king a few decades later.[1755] Hárekr (*c.* 965 – *c.* 1036) of the island of Þjótta (present-day Tjøtta) in Hálogaland and Ásmundr Grankelson share a lot in common: Hárekr was 'immensely rich' (*brátt vellauðigr*) but his wealth was new and procured at the expense of driving petty landowners (*smábœndr*) from Þjótta, but so was Ásmundr's – his father enriched himself by plunder abroad; Hárekr hosted kings, and so did Ásmundr's father. But Hárekr traced his lineage back to King Haraldr inn Hárfagri and was for this reason respected by other Norwegian rulers (ON *landshøfðingar*), whereas Ásmundr was a son of a rich *bóndi*. As someone 'who ha[s] a hereditary claim on power' and thus 'entitled to receiving it from kings' (*er ættbornir erum til ríkis at hafa af konungum*), Hárekr resented Ásmundr with whom he was commanded by King

1750 *Kjalnesinga Saga* and *Finnboga Saga Ramma* call some Norwegian emigrants from King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's rule ON *ríkir menn* (ÍF XIV, pp. 4, 257), but *Heimskringla* calls them ON *ríkismenn* (*HaHáFgHkr*, chap 19, p. 118). Non-Christian Nordic chieftains buried in mounds could be referred to as either (*Vatnsdæla Saga*, chap 2, p. 5; *ÓlHlSer*, Prologue, p. 4). A cursory look at the footnote apparatus in critical editions indicates that the choice between the two in individual manuscripts may sometimes have been a pure scribal preference.

1751 E.g., *Finnboga Saga Ramma* has *ríkismenn* of Orkney invited to a feast (ÍF XIV, p. 290); Ketill Flatnefr does not wish for himself the same lot as other Norwegian *ríkismenn* subjugated by King Haraldr inn Hárfagri (*Laxdæla Saga*, chap 2, p. 4). In *Grágás*, ON *ríkismenn* occurs only as an elaboration on (Norwegian) king and/or jarls (*GrgStað*, Ómagabálkr, §101, p. 132; Vígslóði, §§330, 371, pp. 358, 388). In ONP, the selection of entries containing ON *ríkismenn* pertains to mainland Scandinavia, other foreign countries, or fiction altogether.

1752 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 46, p. 58 (recycled in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 39, p. 88); *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 48, p. 277 (initially recycled from the so-called *Oldest Saga of King Óláfr* and later in *Fagrskinna*, chap 31, p. 182). A similar statement *a contrario* can be deduced from the statement that King Sverrir made *ríkismenn* out of many of his followers who had no birth right to it (*engar ættir áttu til*) – apparently, to judge from the same paragraph, by enfeoffment and thereby elevating them to government (*hóf marga til ríkis*; *Sverris Saga*, chap 100, p. 155).

1753 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 1, 32–33, pp. 3, 39–42 (recycled in *ÓlHlSer*, chaps 18, 33–34, pp. 31, 67–71).

1754 *Morkinskinna* would not explicitly state Úlfr's being a *ríkr maðr*, but would strongly contextually imply it: to solidify his violent submission of the Uppløndic *bændr*, King Haraldr Sigurðarson set on a tour of feasts (ON *veizlur*) around this province and was invited to Úlfr's while staying at Árni's, a *ríkr maðr*. One is led to assume Úlfr and Árni's roughly equal social station.

1755 *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 41, pp. 226–230. Úlfr's genealogy may have been made up on spot by King Haraldr Sigurðarson to justify the confiscation of Úlfr's property, or by the author of *Morkinskinna* to explain the details of the confiscation known from the integrated skaldic *vísa*.

Óláfr Haraldsson to evenly split his office and revenues.[1756] This state of things may even go further back in time. A *bóndi*, *ríkr maðr*, and *yfirmaðr* (lit. leader, head) of the Raumsdalr (present-day Romsdal, northernmost Western Norway) *herað* by the eponymous name of Ketill Raumr considered himself equal to other *ríkir menn* – jarls and kings – who used to be buried in mounds. If Aron Gurevich's guess is correct, the commoner *yfirmaðr herads* Ketill differed in name only from the kingly *herads hǫldr* Haraldr inn Hárfagri and other *fylkiskonungar* (above, p. 293) in whose epoch, by the sagas' testimony, both lived.[1757] Áki, 'the most powerful farmer [*bóndi*] in Vermaland, very wealthy' (*ríkastr bóndi á Vermalandi, stórauðigr*)[1758] invites Kings Haraldr inn Hárfagri and Eiríkr (d. 882?); the latter takes to heart their equal treatment and reminds the host that he is Eiríkr's man, to which follows a reply that the king is his man just as much.[1759] The acknowledgement of Haraldr Sigurðarson's royal title claimed at the meeting in Guðbrandsdalar (present-day Gudbrandsdalen in Opplandene) in 1046 or 1047 AD was instigated by "one man from the *bændr*" (*einn maðr af bóndum*), Steigar-Þórir Þórðarson (*c.* 1031–1094). He was Haraldr's fifteen-year-old maternal (i.e. non-royal) cousin, son to and heir of the 'most powerful ["second greatest" in the *Legendary Saga of King Óláfr*][1760] person in the northern part of [Guðbrands]dalar' (*maðr ríkastr í inn nørðra hlut Dala*) and its chieftain (*hǫfðingi*). Steigar-Þórir was lavishly rewarded for his act by Haraldr and later became a great *hǫfðingi*.[1761] Even people of royal descent, if struggling for own autonomy, may be nick-named *bændr*. Before eventually swearing allegiance to and becoming a *lendr maðr* of King Óláfr Tryggvason, Hárekr of Þjótta initially resisted his aggressive proselytism in Hálogaland until kidnapped at sea and brought to the king at sword point. In this instance *Heimskringla* uses ON *bóndi* as Hárekr's occupational by-name, probably to stress his independence from and insubmission to Óláfr.[1762]

In instances such as these, ON *bóndi* would emphasise one's status initially not incumbent on kingship, and adjectival qualifications would highlight its *de facto* aristocratic nature. Granted, this use is probably illustrative first of all of the language and concepts at the time of writing. The Son in *Konungs Skuggsjá* illustrates this point neatly by asking the Father why anyone 'as have an abundance of wealth and kinsmen' would consider serving as a king's housecarl rather than 'remain at home looking after their property as other *bændr* do'.[1763] It is probable that in this lexical respect, ON *bóndi* concurred with ON *hǫldr* in its emphasis

1756 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 104, 106, 123, pp. 175, 177, 211 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chaps 91, 93, 112, pp. 256–258, 260, 320).

1757 *Vatnsdæla Saga*, chap 2, pp. 3–5. *Cf.* how in *Grettis Saga* (chap 18, pp. 56–57) the *lendr maðr*'s Þórfinnr Kársson father was also buried in a mound with lavish goods.

1758 Note that *Heimskringla* uses the same adjective in respect of the *lendir menn* that 'were come from lines of kings or jarls not many generations back': see above, n. 1752.

1759 *HaHáFgrHkr*, chap 14, p. 111. The episode is likely fictional but illustrative nonetheless.

1760 *…annar maðr mestr í Dölunum* (*ÓlHlLeg*, chap 34, p. 256).

1761 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 112, 128, pp. 186, 220 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 117, p. 335); *Fagrskinna*, chap 52, pp. 242–243.

1762 *Sigurðr mælti til Háreks bónda…* ("Sigurðr said to Hárekr *bóndi*..."; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 75, p. 321).

1763 *Hvat snuð sia þeir mænn ser ikonongs þionosto er bæde ægu yfrit fe oc kyn at skyllda sec til konongs þionosto mæð huscarls nafni ænu saman. Hvi hafa þæir ægi þær nafnbætr at heita hirðmænn eða ællingar vela heima um sina coste. sæm aðrer bænndr gæra* (*Skuggsjá*, chap 54, p. 42). For consistency's sake, the original *bændr* were preferred to Larson's 'husbandmen'.

on insubmission and independence,[1764] to judge from the circumstances that gave Bjǫrn *hǫldr* Brynjólfsson his by-name.[1765]

In accordance with no. 2 on the list of suggested onomasiological *thegnly* criteria (above, p. 302), odal can appear in the interaction between the aristocrats in the analysed taxonomy and kings. As already mentioned, King Hákon inn Góði is credited with a restitution of odals to Þrœndalǫg's *bœndr* and thereby making them odal-born.[1766] Ásbjǫrn of Meðalhús (present-day Melhus in an eponymous commune in Trøndelag), one of 'the most distinguished people' (*ina ágætustu menn*)[1767] and one of the anti-Christian *hǫfðingar*, later reminded this fact to the king on behalf of and as one the *bœndr*.[1768] Self-will and violation of *status quo* by rulers other than only King Haraldr inn Hárfagri force *ríkismenn* to "flee from their odals" (ON *flýja óðǫl sín*).[1769] Raids into Þrœndalǫg by semi-legendary King Eysteinn of Upplǫnd and Heiðmǫrk professedly caused emigration of many *hǫfðingjar*, and 'many people' fled from their odals.[1770] Conversely, in *c.* 1096 AD Sveinki Steinarsson, one of the *ríkismenn* and the "most powerful person" (*inn ríkasti maðr*) east by the river Göta, refused to surrender to the Norwegian King Magnús Berfœttr's rule. Sveinki, the source says, would rather die fighting for his land than "flee from his odal" but was eventually cajoled by negotiators into a temporary exile on condition of retaining his property run for him by them in his absence.[1771] With the tentative connexion of ancestral allodial landed property rights and burial mounds, *Oláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka*'s assertion that in the Age of Mounds, *ríkismenn* used to be buried in mounds but *alþýða* in the ground[1772] may be

1764 Consider, for example, that *BorgL* §9:3, p. 136, stipulates that *lendir menn* who do not have an allocated lot in the church graveyard should lie with the *bœndr* (*liggia i bonda lego*). While it may mean the *hǫldar* from the next clause, here, ON *bœndr* could be a catch-all term for otherwise carefully distinguished free and freed parishioners in §§9:4–7, because §9:10 specifically penalises burying a fully freed person (ON *leysingi*) from §9:5 together with the *hǫldar* (*i haulz lego*) from §9:4. *Cf.* the composition of the army of the *lendir menn* and *bœndr* marching to Stiklastaðir against King Óláfr Haraldsson, according to *Heimskringla*: '...a lot of landed men in it and a large number of powerful farmers, though the rest was all the rabble, who were peasants and labourers' (*…lendra manna ok mikill fjǫldi ríkra búanda, en þó var hitt allr múgr, er váru þorparar ok verkmenn*; *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 216, p. 370), – it is hard to escape the conclusion that ON *bœndr* in *Borgarþingslǫg* intends to cover all those not in personal service to the king, and ON *ríkir bœndr* in *Heimskringla* those few of them otherwise known as ON *hǫldar*. How they are oppesed to ON *múgr* made of *þorparar ok verkmenn* is reminiscent both of *allra þegna, bæði ríkra ok óríkra, ok alls múgsins* who take Magnús inn Góði as king, and of various reasons of discontent among the *bœndr* (*ok búþegnar*?) and *verkalýðr ok þrælar* in response to work-free Christian Sundays (above, p. 241).

1765 *Cf.* the consistency in *Heimskringla*'s separation of the *bœndr* from King Hákon inn Góði's *hirð*: *…hafði ekki lið nema hirð sína ok bœndr þá, er verit hǫfðu í boði hans* ('...he had no force except his personal following and the *bœndr* who had been invited there'); *Hafði hann þar hirð sína ok bœndr marga í boði sínu* ('He had there his personal following and many *bœndr* at his invitation'); *Þá skipar hann hirðinni í eina fylking ok bóndum þar með ok setti upp merki sín* ('Then he arranges his following in battle order and the farmers as well, and raised his banner'; *HáGóHkr*, chap 22, 28, pp. 177, 182–183, 185). To demonstrate this verbal opposition, I allowed myself to substitute the 'farmers' in Finlay and Faulkes's translation with "*bœndr*" on all three occasions.

1766 *HáGóHkr*, chap 1, p. 151.

1767 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 67, p. 316.

1768 *Þat hugðu vér bœndr...*; *er þat vili várr ok samþykki bóndanna…*; *þá hǫfum vér bœndr gort ráð várt...* ('What we farmers thought...'; 'this is what we desire and the farmers have agreed on...'; 'we farmers have made our decision...'; *HáGóHkr*, chap 15, pp. 169–170).

1769 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 74, 98, pp. 162–163 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chaps 56, 82, pp. 148, 236).

1770 *HáGóHkr*, chap 12, p. 165. The episode may be fictional (also discussed below, §4.4.3.4).

1771 *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 60, pp. 29–37. On the literary function of this episode, see Andersson 1994, pp. 67–68.

1772 *ÓlHlSer*, Prologue, p. 4. *Heimskringla* allows *varia lectio* in respect of those in whose honour practitioners of an ethnic religion in Þrœndalǫg used to raise memorial toasts: manuscripts in the *Kringla* and *Frísbók* redactions read ON *þeira er heygðir hǫfðu verit* ('those who had been buried in mounds'), but manuscripts of the *Jöfraskinna* redaction read ON *þeira er gofgir hǫfðu verit* ("those who had been of noble descent"; *HáGóHkr*,

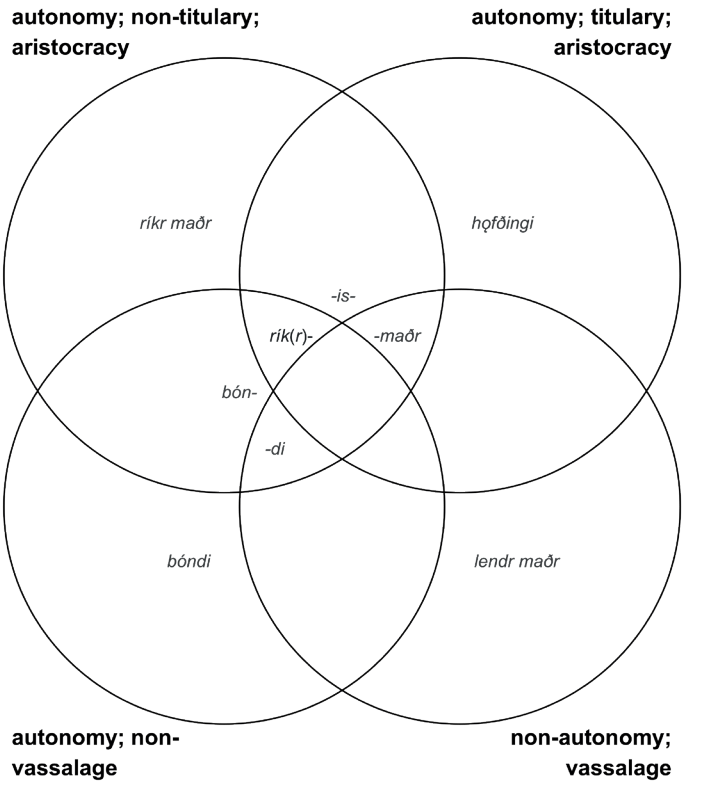

Figure 7. Medieval conceptual map of (notional) Scandinavian Viking-Age elites (simplified): a Venn diagram

yet another hint at odal as the source of social and economic power of one and the same diversely named Viking-Age elite.

4.4.3.3 Viking-Age socio-political tug of war and its dynamics

Because available vernacular sources deal primarily with Norway, this section must also extrapolate from the Norwegian precedent. But by and large, similar processes, though at various pace, were underway in Denmark and in the Svíar–Gautar polities.

Above all else, the Viking-Age political landscape appears, to borrow a phrase from Sverre Bagge, a political game. It was played by a multitude of bidders for power of various calibre: non-titled magnates, *hersar*, jarls, foreign rulers, and native petty kings (ON *heraðskonungar*, *fylkiskonungar*) between the deaths of the first supposed high king (ON *einvaldskonungr*) Haraldr inn Hárfagri and his distant descendant Sigurðr Sýr's.[1773] Figure 8 offers a glimpse from this tightly knit and complex social network, as well as from the fact of many a power bidder's comparable footing to that of the Ynglingar–Hárfagri. With the dying out of the Hlaðir jarl dynasty in 1029 AD and the Jelling royal dynasty's loss of grip on Norway shortly thereafter, the emergence of one particular (potentially pretender if the true Hárfagri family died out with the sons of Eiríkr Blóðøx) Ynglingar–Hárfagri line as the dominant force overshadows other players. But certain common patterns in the shared socio-political tactics transpire nonetheless.

chap 14, p. 168). *Vatnsdæla Saga* (chap 2, p. 5) superficially narrows down the *ríkir menn* in the pre-Christian burial mounds to kings and jarls, here collectively called *hǫfðingjar*, but see above.

1773 *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 48, p. 277 (recycled in *Fagrskinna*, chap 31, p. 181).

Top contenders in sagas and synoptic histories wield a classical arsenal of methods to co-opt other participants in Bagge's metaphor of a political game. They come down first of all to personal interactions and promotions.

Royal players had their children fostered at homes of *ríkis-/ríkir menn*,[1774] *lendir menn*,[1775] and *gǫfgir menn*.[1776] Royal players also married their[1777] and *ríkir bœndr*'s daughters in return,[1778] as did jarls[1779] (see examples in Figure 8). Kings shared regal revenue and appointed other players to high positions but also took hostages from them.[1780] Kings also got hosted by *lendir menn* and *stór-/ríkir bœndr* and *ríkir bœndr*, and their offspring sometimes got recruited into royal service/following as a counter-favour.[1781] Texts abound with mentions that when at amicable terms, kings, jarls, *hǫfðingjar*, *stórmenni*, *gǫfgir menn*, *stór-/ríkir bœndr* relied on such reciprocal hosting to solidify co-optation. The same is reported about non-Norwegian kings as well.[1782] This co-optation brought the needed military and civil agency, an essential conduit of an effective (over)lordship. For instance, kings recruited *ríkis-/ríkir menn* and *gǫfgir menn* for military expeditions.[1783] Political and peace negotiations were also frequently mediated by them,[1784] and texts equally abound with casual references to *hǫfðingjar*, *lendir menn*, *stórmenni*, *gǫfgir menn*, *ríkismenn*, and *ríkir bœndr* responding to, perhaps less voluntary, kings and jarls' military summons and partaking in war.[1785]

On the receiving end, economic profits were one of the obvious gains from such co-optation. These came from various sources and in various forms that are best recorded for the non-royal players from the upper crust. Hárekr of Þjótta, it seems, had his pre-existing tributes from Hálogalanders (ON *veizlur*) merely confirmed by Kings Óláfr Tryggvason and then Óláfr Haraldsson upon successively becoming their *lendr maðr* during their visits

1774 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 3, p. 96; *ÓlTrHkr*, chaps, 1, 92, p. 225, 342.
1775 *HaGrHkr*, chap 11, p. 215.
1776 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 88, p. 130.
1777 *HaGrHkr*, chap 11, p. 215; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 1, p. 225.
1778 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 69, p. 89; *MaSonHkr*, chaps 19–20, pp. 257–258.
1779 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 19, p. 248. Sources also mention Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson's (*c.* 937–995) predilection to sexually imposing himself on daughters of *ríkismenn* (*ÓlTrHkr*, chap 45, pp. 290–291; *Fagrskinna*, chap 22, p. 139) which eventually caused his demise when a *ríkr bóndi* Ormr Lyrgja refused to prostitute his wife in such manner, called a levy, and cornered the jarl (*ÓlTrHkr*, chaps 48–49, pp. 293–298). It cannot be ruled out that Jarl Hákon's promiscuity was invented for literary sake, as the jarl's socio-sexual behaviours corresponds to the 13th-century Icelandic patterns (see further Sigurðsson 1999, p. 84; Magnúsdóttir 2001; 2008), or at the very least it could have been re-interpreted. A similar motif occurs in the 15th-century indigenous Icelandic chivalric *Sigrgarðs Saga Frækna* ("The Saga of Sigrgarðr the Brave", chap 2) in which a king's womanising son seduces many beautiful and well-born (ON *velættaðar*) ladies to a great dismay of their *ríkismenn* families (Hall, Richardson, and Þorgeirsson 2013, p. 105).
1780 *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 54, pp. 310–311; *ÓlTrHkr*, chaps 67, p. 318.
1781 *HaHáFgrHkr*, chap 14, pp. 109–111; *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 105, p. 176; *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 41, p. 226; *Færeyinga Saga*, chap 29, p. 68 (from the *Flateyjarbók* redaction of *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*).
1782 *YngHkr*, chap 19, p. 37; *HálSvHkr*, chap 8, p. 92; *ÓlTrHkr*, chaps 35, 48, 67, pp. 273, 293 315; *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 32, 57, 61, 81, 92, 94, 106, 128, 162, 178, pp. 40, 72–73, 81, 118, 146, 151–152, 177, 219–220, 296, 323.
1783 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 97, p. 348; *HaSigHkr*, chap 86, p. 183; *MaBærHkr*, chap 23, p. 233; *MaSonHkr*, chap 1, p. 238; *MaBlHaGilHkr*, chap 3, p. 281, – in the latter case, the actor is referred to as "one powerful *bóndi*" (*einn hverr búandi ríkr*).
1784 *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 9, p. 216; *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 3, p. 27; *HaGrHkr*, chap 6, p. 211; *MaGóHkr*, chap 6, p. 12; *HaSigHkr*, chap 50, p. 131.
1785 *Fagrskinna*, chap 3, p. 67; *HaHáFgHkr*, chaps 9, 36, pp. 101, 141; *HáGóHkr*, chap 19, p. 13l; *ÓlTrHkr*, chaps 24, 40, 42, 97 pp. 254, 279, 285, 348; *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 81, 177, 162, 177, 196, pp. 118, 320, 347; *MaGóHkr*, chap 19, 29, pp. 33, 46; *HaSigHkr*, chaps 34, 87, 93, pp. 114, 183–184, 192; *MaBerHkr*, chaps 5, 23, 25, pp. 214, 233, 236; *Ágrip*, chaps 48–49, p. 45–46.

up north with a large force.[1786] 'A great chieftain and [...] a very intelligent person' Kálfr Árnason (*c.* 990–1051), Hárekr's brother-in-law and a son of a *lendr maðr*, himself became one when he took over the possessions of Ǫlvir from Eggja (present-day Egge in the Sparbu commune in Trøndelag).[1787] Therewith Kálfr also took charge of inland Þrœndaloǫg after a pogrom of the local practitioners of ethnic religion by the king and property confiscation from Ǫlvir[1788] (although see below, p. 316). Einarr Þambarskelfir (*c.* 980 – *c.* 1050) married into the clan of the jarls of Hlaðir and was indirectly related to the numerous and well-born (ON *kynstórir*, *gǫfgir*)[1789] *hersir* clan of Hǫrða-Kári, a powerful in-law of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri[1790] from Hǫrðaland (see Figure 8). Though fighting for King Óláfr Tryggvason in his last and lost battle in unknown quality, with his wealth, Einarr could afford a high lifestyle without seeking royal patronage from King Óláfr Haraldsson[1791] and even initially resisted him under the jarls of Hlaðir.[1792] With the change of tides after Óláfr's fall, Einarr became one of the chief supporters of Óláfr's son Magnús and together with Kálfr Árnason manoeuvred him onto the throne. In retribution, King Magnús inn Góði granted revenues (ON *veizlur*) to *ríkismenn*[1793] and to Einarr in particular. He subsequently became 'the most powerful of the landed men in Þrándheimr' and 'most extremely wealthy'.[1794] Another contemporary, Erlingr Skjálgsson (*c.* 975–1028) from Hǫrða-Kári's lineage (see Figure 8), had part of his income generated by economic management of his own landed properties. He would endow thirty of his slaves with plots of land with the prospect of buying freedom to then purchase more slaves with this cash and to restart the cycle. Erlingr maintained some economic and social control over them, as he would assign them works and surround himself with no less that ninety freed persons and even more than two (long?) hundred when visited by a jarl.[1795] He was promoted by King Óláfr Tryggvason through an arranged marriage with his royal sister. With it Erlingr received large profits in Western Norway[1796] and was considered the most high-born *lendr maðr* of his time,[1797] though still content with the title of a *hersir* in the manner of his relatives. Like Einarr, Erlingr then aligned himself with the jarls of Hlaðir by marrying his son into their family, and expectedly, the two resisted King Óláfr Haraldsson's rise to power. Erlingr had to nominally reconcile with the king but was stripped of a part of his revenues. To compensate, he overtaxed the *bœndr* on the territories under his control. In the words of discontent ascribed to Óláfr by *Heimskringla*, Erlingr thereby assaulted their freedom and, himself being odal-born, mistreated his odal-born peers.[1798]

1786 *ÓlTrHkr*, chaps 59, 74–77, pp. 309, 320–324; *…veizlur, svá sem hann hafði haft af hinum fyrrum landshǫfðingjum* (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 105, p. 176, reproduced from *ÓlHlSer*, chap 99, p. 259).
1787 On Eggja, see Røskaft 2003, pp. 138–139.
1788 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 109–110, pp. 180–182 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 96, pp. 267–269).
1789 *HaGrHkr*, chap 14, p. 218; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 54, p. 304.
1790 *HaHáFgrHkr*, chap 37, p. 143.
1791 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 115, 144, pp. 192, 267.
1792 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 46, p. 58.
1793 *MaGóHkr*, chap 21, pp. 35–36.
1794 *...ríkastr lendra manna í Þrándheimi* [...]. *Hafði Einarr þó veizlur sínar, þær sem hann hafði haft, meðan Magnús konungr lifði* (*HaSigHkr*, chap 40, p. 122).
1795 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 22–23, pp. 29–30.
1796 *ÓlHlSer*, chap 30, p. 58.
1797 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 171, p. 307 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 30, pp. 61); *Fagrskinna*, chap 31, p. 182.
1798 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 116, pp. 192–193 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 103, pp. 286–289). On Erlingr, see further Bagge 1991, pp. 78, 125–128.

Other, oblique or otherwise, references suggest that distributing pre-existing or solicited profits were regular sinews in the aristocratic machine. The jarls of Hlaðir confirmed Erlingr Skjálgsson's revenues previously granted by King Óláfr Tryggvason.[1799] The same king supposedly made unnamed *høfðingjar* in the Vík, who had previously held lands from the Danish overseas king, hold them from him.[1800] King Óláfr Haraldsson carved a source of income for Ásmundr Grankelsson out of Hárekr of Þjótta's share. During his invasion of England, King Haraldr Sigurðarson, if *Heimskringla* is to be believed, began first thing to 'hand out ranks and fiefs' to unspecified *ríkismenn* forthwith after his victory at Fulford on 20 September 1066 AD.[1801] King Óláfr Skautkonungr had 'a powerful man and mightily wealthy' Hrói Skjálgi administer the lands along the river Göta and Eilífr Gauzki 'from a great family' ran the lands to the north on the king's behalf.[1802]

The other gain was political capital. No man rules alone, and texts now and then would mention a king ruling with and through a Mitteisian *comitatus* of his leading men, a precursor to the more formalised high-medieval "good people".[1803] Many *ríkismenn* of Þrándheimr took initiative and willingly became King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's men seeing the enrichment of his other jarls and *hersar*.[1804] He had *ríkismenn* and *bændr* of Northern Mœri and Raumsdalr support his appointee, Jarl Rǫgnvaldr Eysteinsson (d. *c.* 890?).[1805] If there is any truth to prose accounts of these incidents in Haraldr's otherwise domineering style of reign, he must have been a more cunning lord than his immediate successor Eiríkr Blóðøx and then his sons. Eiríkr's defeat by his half-brother Hákon inn Góði is blamed by *Heimskringla* on the defection of many *ríkismenn* from Eiríkr to Hákon.[1806] The Eiríkssynir eventually defeated Hákon. But, at least in sagas' exposition, they soon alienated other players by behaving like a bull in a political china-shop, killing many kings, jarls, and *ríkismenn*[1807] and treacherously stripping their own relatives and *ríkimenn* (*sic*) of power and *gofgir menn* of their rights (ON *vanrétti*). All this caused one of the Eiríkssynir's murder by the *hersir* Þórketill Klyppr (or Kleypr) from Hǫrða-Kári's clan and another by the *bændr*;[1808] many *ríkismenn* who had previously fled their odals (= the *gofgir menn* deprived by the Eiríkssynir of their rights?) found themselves in the opposing army of King Haraldr Blátǫnn.[1809] In comparison, King Hákon inn Góði had treaded far more cautiously, according to his medieval biographers. In a similar manner to his father in Jarl Rǫgnvaldr's case, Hákon assigned *gofgir menn* to counsel and rule with his young nephews. Notably, before attempting a mass conversion in Þrœndalǫg he enticed some of the local *ríkismenn*.[1810]

Sagas assertain that Hákon's religious initiative failed in the long run. But King Óláfr Tryggvason went the same way when he persuaded the *landshǫfðingjar* from the clan of

1799 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 31, 60, pp. 39, 78.
1800 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 51, p. 299.
1801 *HaSigHkr*, chap 86, p. 183.
1802 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 61, p. 79.
1803 Helle 1972.
1804 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 6, p. 98; although as said, this administrative innovation may have existed only in the imagination of *Heimskringla*'s author. *Fagrskinna*, chap 3, p. 66, says that 'some [Prœndir] submitted to him willingly and in friendship, some in fear' (*gengu sumir undir hann með vild ok vináttu, sumir með ótta*).
1805 *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 10, p. 103.
1806 *HáGóHkr*, chap 3, p. 152.
1807 *Fagrskinna*, chap 14, p. 102.
1808 *ÓlHlSer*, chap 13, p. 24.
1809 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 15, p. 240.
1810 *HáGóHkr*, chaps 2, 13, pp. 151–152, 165–166.

Hǫrða-Kári to support his Christian mission in Western Norway,[1811] and before then his relatives and allies in the Vík. In return he promised to 'make [them] all great and powerful men', and it was the baptism of these 'most powerful of the people who were then present' that set the example for people down the social hierarchy.[1812] In Iceland, Óláfr's emissary Þangbrandr preached through force and caused unrest, so that already converted Icelanders pleaded the king to instead act through sons of the Icelandic *ríkir menn*.[1813] The same, probably inevitable in the socio-political realities at hand, tactics were used by King Óláfr Haraldsson. Where *Heimskringla* narrates at long how he defeated a coalition of petty Uppløndic kings (above, p. 289), the *Legendary Saga of King Óláfr* succinctly has him win the Uppløndic *ríkismenn* with the help of lavish gifts.[1814] He had the *høfðingjar* opposing his proselytism executed but the supporting ones enfeoffed to carry out the mission.[1815]

When harmonious, this image of joint rulership from the retrospective narrative sources approximates the early medieval *consensus fidelium*. King Óláfr Haraldsson's *høfðingjar* dissuaded him from raiding Gautland in retaliation of obstructions to his marital alliance with a Swedish princess.[1816] Upon the end of the conflict, Óláfr went on his bridal journey and surrounded himself with all *stórmenni* 'that he could get hold of', each with a splendid following.[1817] King Magnús inn Góði's acceptance as the Danish king was facilitated by the most distinguished (ON *ágætastir*) Danish *landshøfðingjar* bound to him through personal oaths.[1818] Like King Hákon inn Góði's nephews a century prior, Magnús and his Danish opponent and former appointee, Sveinn Ástríðarson, both underage, were guided by regency councils of *ríkismenn*.[1819] King Sigurðr Jórsalafari sought his *høfðingjar*'s counsel when deciding how to treat his supposed half-brother Haraldr Gilli, though they deferred to his own judgement.[1820] Sigurðr's full brother King Eysteinn Magnússon (r. 1103–1123) annexed Jamtaland without bloodshed by negotiating fealty with the local *ríkismenn* who then exacted oaths of loyalty from the populace to the same effect.[1821] At the start of their reign, the infant co-kings Sigurðr Munnr and Ingi shared one privy council of *høfðingjar*.[1822]

Should one look further than Norway in Old Norse accounts, they would find a similar order of things. It was probably expected or considered regular that the first co-optative act of a newly installed king, especially of a tender age, would be to select himself counsellors to reign with. These came from the discussed milieu. That is what the Norwegian King

1811 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 56, p. 306.
1812 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 53, p. 303.
1813 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 84, pp. 332–333.
1814 The phrasing is highly illustrative and deserves quoting in full: *Ok þenna sama vetr miðlaði Óláfr konungr gull ok silfr við Upplendinga ok gaf ríkismönnum, ok drógust undir vinsæld oc fjölmenne* ("That winter, King Óláfr shared gold and silver with Uppløndes and gave [it] to *ríkismenn*, and this furthered him in popularity and a large following"; *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 22, p. 242).
1815 *Fagrskinna*, chap 23, p. 145.
1816 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 90, p. 133. This episode (*Friðgerðarsaga*) and its literary and ideological dimension and evolution from the *Legendary Saga of King Óláfr* to *Heimskringla* have been studied in detail by Lönnroth 1976 (I am most grateful to Matthew Driscoll for advising me on the conference's proceedings).
1817 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 87, p. 129. A similar trope can be found in *Knýtlinga Saga* (chap 42, p. 233): when a Danish king set on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1103 AD, he was accompanied by many native and foreign *ríkismenn*, and many *høfðingjar* chipped in monetarily.
1818 *MaGóHkr*, chap 20, p. 35; *HaSigHkr*, chap 79, p. 174.
1819 *MaGóHkr*, chap 6, p. 12.
1820 *MaSonHkr*, chap 26, p. 267.
1821 *MaSonHkr*, chap 15, pp. 255–256, discussed by Hermanson 2011, pp. 66–67.
1822 *Ágrip*, chap 59, pp. 51–52.

Magnús inn Góði did after his *konungstekja* at Eyra,[1823] but so also did a short while prior the Swedish King Ǫnundr-Jakob.[1824] The sagas make King Cnut's underage son Hǫrða-Knútr (r. 1035/1040–1042) become a puppet king in Denmark in an intrigue orchestrated by his guardian Jarl Úlfr (*c.* 988–1026). The jarl used the Danish *hǫfðingjar*'s supposed discontent with a vacant throne as a pretext and their support to persuade the Danes to accept Hǫrða-Knútr. Upon King Cnut's urgent return to fight off a foreign threat, Hǫrða-Knútr sought the advice of the jarl and other *hǫfðingjar* only to shortly thereafter submit to his kingly father.[1825] King Óláfr Skautkonungr had 'twelve of the wisest men' in his council, three of which 'were powerful and wealthy, of high lineage and great wisdom and all of them dear to the king'.[1826] King Jarizleifr of Garðaríki (i.e. the Kyivan prince Yaroslav the Wise, r. 1010/1019–1054) took counsel from his queen and other *hǫfðingjar* upon receiving Einarr and Kálfr's embassy to retrieve from his court the future King Magnús inn Góði.[1827] The English *hǫfðingjar* assembled to elect King Harold son of Godwine the same day King Edward the Confessor died, but Earl Tósti, in *Heimskringla*'s exposition, demanded that *landshǫfðingjar* choose him instead.[1828]

The relationship between the Ynglingar–Hárfagri and other elite players was far from rosy, though. There arose numerous conflicts whose dynamics may appropriately be summarised as a tug of war born out of hard-to-reconcile goal settings within the said relationship, and well-illustrated by two putative speeches. In the sources' presentation, the elites expressed readiness to co-opt, even if loath when cornered, but also unwillingness to surrender own agency. In Erlingr Skjálgsson's (likely invented) words:

> 'That service will be of most advantage to you [= King Óláfr Haraldsson] that I offer to you of my own free will'.[1829]

The Ynglingar–Hárfagri, on the other hand, demonstrated a domineering approach to rulership and maximally possible locking all personal elite allegiances on own persons. It is aptly captured in King Óláfr Haraldsson's not easily refusable offer to Uppland petty kings and royal offspring to renounce their titles in exchange for exemption from maiming and exile:

> "[...] become my *lendir menn*. Then you shall have a great honour from me", he said, "because in this country I alone grant this [= royal] title to myself". And many chose to serve him...[1830]

Later, in the High Middle Ages, comparable chasms would receive ideological formulations in the political theories of government as *regimen politicum* (lit. political rule) and *dominium regale*

1823 *MaGóHkr*, chap 3, p. 9.
1824 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 94, p. 156.
1825 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 148, pp. 275–277, – *cf. Fagrskinna*, chap 36, p. 202.
1826 *Ólafr konungr hafði með sér tólf hina spǫkustu menn... Þeir bræðr allir váru menn ríkir ok auðgir ok kynstórir ok forvitra, ok allir kærir konungi* (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 94, pp. 152–153).
1827 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 251, p. 415.
1828 *HaSigHkr*, chaps 77–78, pp. 171–172.
1829 *"Sú mun þér mín þjónosta hallkvæmst, er ek veiti þér með sjálfræði"* (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 60, p. 78).
1830 *...„ok gerist lendir menn mínir. Munu þér þá mikla virðing af mér hafa", sagði hann, „fyrir því at ek ann engum manni tignarnafn í þvísa landi nema mér einum." En þat kusu fleiri at þjóna honum...* (*ÓlHlLeg*, chap 24, p. 243). A very similar, possibly based on this same passage, sentiment is ascribed by *Heimskringla* to King Óláfr Tryggvason when he compels his sister to marry Erlingr Skjálgasson whom she considered lower born than herself: 'I would be getting the power to make anyone I want in this country noble' (*…ek mynda fá vald til at gera þann tíginn mann, sem ek vil, hér í landi*; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 67, p. 307).

(lit. royal lordship).[1831] The latter found support in a developed ecclesiastical component and by then political exclusiveness of the incumbent dynasties.[1832] In the absence of both of these ideologies in an articulated form, the Viking Age seems to have had less to do with overarching articulated principles of governance and more with individual practical collisions over (in)subordination. Time and again, all Ynglingar–Hárfagri appear to have repeatedly resorted to the "exit–voice–loyalty" policy in the situations on their hands, albeit with various success and most certainly no generations-long master plan.

King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's expansion of lordship and the attendant flight of elite Norwegian drop-outs has already been discussed above (§4.4.2.1). While the details and causal explanations in the existing accounts of these events resist cross-checking in unrelated sources, in and of itself their core seems entirely plausible and comparable with many similar precedents in history. Kings Hákon inn Góði, Óláfr Tryggvason, and to a lesser extent Óláfr Haraldsson's main source of tension with their elites lay in evangelisation attempts, especially in Þrœndaløg.[1833] Here, the *høfðingjar* continuously put up a fight, and with a certain licence it may be possible to reconstruct a few generations of the local elite social network (Figure 8).

King Hákon inn Góði confronted eight *høfðingjar* 'who had most to do with the sacrificial feasts',[1834] all identified by their chief residences. Of the eight, three lived long enough to be forcefully baptised by King Óláfr Tryggvason.[1835] On behalf of the *bœndr* (above, p. 308), the *høfðingi* Ásbjǫrn of Meðalhús threatened Hákon to raise a rebellion unless Hákon withdrew. One may agree with Sverre Bagge that the details of this confrontation are likely literary and Ásbjǫrn's "constitutionalist" arguments fictitious,[1836] and some have even considered Ásbjǫrn himself invented.[1837] But the fact of the confrontation and the motif to it may well be authentic. Speculative as it may be, to eliminate too many a contemporaneous namesake of suspiciously similar standing, it is tempting to identify this Ásbjǫrn with Einarr Þambarskelfir's paternal great-granduncle of the same name[1838] who lived roughly at the same time, and that would then fit other mentions of anti-missionary opposition. On this reading, Styrkárr – Ásbjǫrn's nephew and Einarr's grandfather whose

1831 Bagge 2010, pp. 329–335; 2003, pp. 469–472.

1832 Hermanson 2011.

1833 These tense relationships have been extensively studied before by, e.g., Røskaft 2003. A review of King Óláfr Haraldsson's missionary activity and motives in broader religious context of pre-Gregorian Church doctrine was recently offered by Tveito 2013.

1834 *…er mest réðu fyrir blótum* (*HáGóHkr*, chap 18, p. 172).

1835 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 67, p. 318.

1836 Bagge 2009, p. 5. A good argument to this effect is the verbal overlap between Ásbjǫrn's supposed speech and that of Dala-Guðbrandr, a contemporary of King Óláfr Haraldsson and a *ríkr maðr*, according to the *Legendary Saga of King Óláfr*'s attribution, or a *hersir* approaching the power of a king (*svá var sem konungr væri*) in the eponymous Guðbrandsdalar and comparable to Erlingr Skjálgsson, according to *Heimskringla* and *Óláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka*. In the *Legendary Saga of King Óláfr*, like Ásbjǫrn in the later *Heimskringla*, Dala-Guðbrandr is discontent with the king's proselytism and appeals to the authority of the forefathers with the same word (ON *foreldrar*) who, as the assembly knew, had been wiser and better (*…vítum vér á því deili, at bæði váru þeir várir frændr gǫfgari ok þá vitrari en vér*; *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 33, p. 254, – *cf. hafa þeir verit miklu gǫfgari en vér* in *HáGóHkr*, chap 15, p. 170). To Dala-Guðbrandr's historicity speaks a stanza addressed to him by Sigvatr (Sigv *Erl* 1) as well as figuring in *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, where he is somewhat of a comical character (*Njála*, chaps 87–88, pp. 210–215).

1837 Røskaft 2003, p. 96; on Meðalhús, see the same cited item, pp. 47–48, 96–99. Unlike Dala-Guðbrandr, no skaldic verse is associated with Ásbjǫrn in the extant sources, nor is he a character in any other saga.

1838 *HaGrHkr*, chap 4, p. 218.

chief residence Einarr inherited[1839] – was the *hǫfðingi* from Gimsar in Þrœndalǫg who had previously fought at Hǫrundarfjǫrðr (986 AD) together with another chieftain from Hálogaland, Þórir Hjǫrtr (d. c. 997?), under Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson.[1840] All three were stout polytheists: King Óláfr Tryggvason had Styrkárr and other *hǫfðingjar* Christened at sword point just mentioned above; Þórir died fighting Óláfr's mission in Hálogaland;[1841] Hákon apostatised and renounced baptism forced onto him by King Haraldr Blátǫnn. Then, if this indeed was one and the same Ásbjǫrn, he was the father-in-law of the *hersir* who killed one of the sons of King Eiríkr Blóðøx,[1842] and father to the next leader of the ethnic religionists against the Ynglingar–Hárfagri's proselytism in Þrœndalǫg. This man was the *ríkr bóndi* Járn-Skeggi from Upphaugr (or Úthaugr) in Yrjar (present-day Ørland in Trøndelag), another ally of Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson at Hǫrundarfjǫrðr[1843] and also killed by King Óláfr Tryggvason (briefly discussed above, §4.3.3.2).[1844] Járn-Skeggi ought to have been related to another *ríkr bóndi*, Ormr Lyrgja of Meðalhús, who stood by him,[1845] was one of the forcefully baptised *hǫfðingjar* together with Styrkárr and played an instrumental role in the downfall of Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson shortly before (above, n. 1779). If this geneology is correct, it would explain Óláfr's reconciliation with Járn-Skeggi's family and offer of compensation mediated by many *gǫfgir menn*:[1846] even a zealot like Óláfr had to take note of a powerful and well-connected (including his own Hǫrða-Kári allies) kindred in the area. After Járn-Skeggi's death, the traditionalist *bœndr*'s intercessor before the king became Ǫlvir from Eggja, 'a powerful man and of noble family' (*ríkr maðr ok ættstórr*)[1847] – his ancestor must have been Þrándr Haka who had owned Eggja and been one of the eight *hǫfðingjar* opposing King Hákon inn Góði's Christianisation of Þrœndalǫg. Ǫlvir carried on running customary feasts and was killed in King Óláfr Haraldsson's sudden "crusade" in Þrœndalǫg. Ǫlvir's property, as said, was given to Kálfr Árnason upon marrying Ǫlvir's widow Sigríðr. Granted, there exists certain discrepancy in this latter story. In *Heimskringla*, Ǫlvir and Sigríðr had two sons, Þórir and Grjótgarðr, both killed on King Óláfr Haraldsson's orders: Þórir for accepting a bribe from King Cnut, Grjótgarðr for attempting to avenge his brother. Sigríðr is said to have been the sister of King Óláfr Haraldsson's *lendr maðr* and 'the most powerful man there in the north' Þórir Hundr who was therefore avenging his nephews when he took arms against Óláfr.[1848] But according to the *Legendary Saga of King Óláfr*, Grjótgarðr was a former husband rather than son to Kálfr Árnason's wife. Together with an anonymous nephew (sister's son) of Þórir Hundr, Grjótgarðr too got executed by King Óláfr on receiving money from King Cnut in 1027 AD,[1849] whereas Kálfr never got any reward from King Óláfr and fought him throughout, and Ǫlvir gets not mention whatsoever. Johan Schreiner and Sverre Bagge after him suggest that Kálfr Árnason's conflict of loyalties was a literary invention. Schreiner regarded the name Ǫlvir to have

1839 In one of the synoptic histories, Einarr is identified not by his by-name but by his chief residence, ON *Einarr kappi á Gimsum* (*Morkinskinna*, I, chap 38, p. 212). On this estate, see Røskaft 2003, pp. 100–103.
1840 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 40, p. 279.
1841 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 78, pp. 324–325.
1842 *Ágrip*, chap 9, p. 13; *HaGrHkr*, chap 14, p. 218; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 54, p. 304.
1843 *Fagrskinna*, chap 22, p. 131.
1844 *ÓlTrHkr*, chaps 66, 68–69, pp. 315, 317–318.
1845 *ÓlTrOdMunk*, p. 204 (both redactions).
1846 *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 71, pp. 318–319.
1847 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 107, p. 178 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 94, p. 262).
1848 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 219, p. 373.
1849 *ÓlHlLeg*, chap 68, p. 318.

been taken from Sigvatr's stanzas (above, p. 265), whereas the name Grjótgarðr, Bagge opined, would have been appropriate for a religiously traditionalist chieftain in Þrœndalǫg as it circulated in the Hlaðir jarls' family.[1850]

Discussing the Ynglingar–Hárfagri's motifs to bring Þrœndalǫg to Christian heel may be fraught with teleology. But beyond reasonable doubt the seventy-year-long or so resistance by the Þrœndir aristocracy was of the same origin as their predecessors' rejection of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's model of interaction. First-hand texts clearly indicate the ethnic cult was in these men's hands, as is common to many elites more globally. Besides an ideological strive for legitimacy, just as well there appears to have been a materialistic aspect that altogether enhanced their coercive socio-economic power and added prestige and authority.[1851] *Heimskringla*'s presentation of the Norwegian conversion may well owe to the author's vision of history as a whole.[1852] But worth noting are the concomitant details in the dynamics in this protracted struggle that bear little on this vision: backed only by the ethnically-devoted jarl of Hlaðir, King Hákon inn Góði got nothing for his pains with the *høfðingi* Ásbjǫrn of Meðalhús; backed by the newly-baptised *høfðingjar* in the Vík and Hǫrða-Kári's clan, King Óláfr Tryggvason enforced his will but still had to put up with the *ríkr bóndi* Járn-Skeggi's kindred; backed by the nominally Christian country, King Óláfr Haraldsson confiscated and ostensibly redistributed the *ríkr bóndi* Ǫlvir from Eggja's property.

Another point of dynamics is that between the semi-legendary Áki from Vermaland and Ormr Lyrgja and Járn-Skeggi, sources mention no *stór-/ríkir bœndr*. Their mentions henceforth are also worth considering. King Óláfr Tryggvason entered two conflicts with individual *ríkir bœndr* and never co-opted any. The unruliness by the *nouveaux riches ríkismenn* and *lendir menn* are located by *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* in the interregnum period of the early 11th century (above, p. 306); noteworthily, at a chronologically close point in time *Heimskringla* says that sons of the *lendir menn* and *ríkir bœndr*, brought under the umbrella of ON *ríkir menn* in some manuscripts, were accustomed to go raiding abroad in search of wealth.[1853] King Óláfr Haraldsson's enemies never were individual *ríkir bœndr*, only depersonsonalised collectives in the ON formula *lendir menn ok ríkir bœndr*.[1854] Contrarily, he co-opted both by attracting sons of the *ríkir bœndr* and feasting with the *ríkismenn, lendir menn*, and *stór-/ríkir bœndr* during tours around the country.[1855] King Magnús inn Góði could also muster troops of both the *lendir menn* and *ríkir bœndr*,[1856] and the same two groups went with King Sigurðr on his crusade to Palestine.[1857] According to an anecdote, early in his reign King Haraldr Sigurðarson intended to reward and promote to a *lendr maðr* an otherwise unknown 'very wealthy and accomplished man' Hǫgni Langbjǫrnsson for passing a test of political allegiance staged by Haraldr himself for the Norwegian *høfðingar*. Hǫgni hosted the king, accepted his friendship, and agreed to assist him all around. But he discarded the title to avoid mockery by other *lendir menn* because of the lack of *lendir menn* ancestors and preferred to stay first among the *bœndr* rather than to become the last among the *lendir*

1850 Bagge 2009, p. 73.
1851 To my knowledge, the problem has been latest at the time of publication comprehensively reviewed by Sundqvist 2016, chap 5 *et passim*.
1852 Steinsland 2000, pp. 101–124.
1853 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 181, pp. 328–329.
1854 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 74, 130, 181, 216, pp. 104–105, 222, 370.
1855 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 61, 105–106, 162, pp. 81, 176–177, 296.
1856 *MaGóHkr*, chap 19, p. 33.
1857 *MaSonHkr*, chap 1, p. 238.

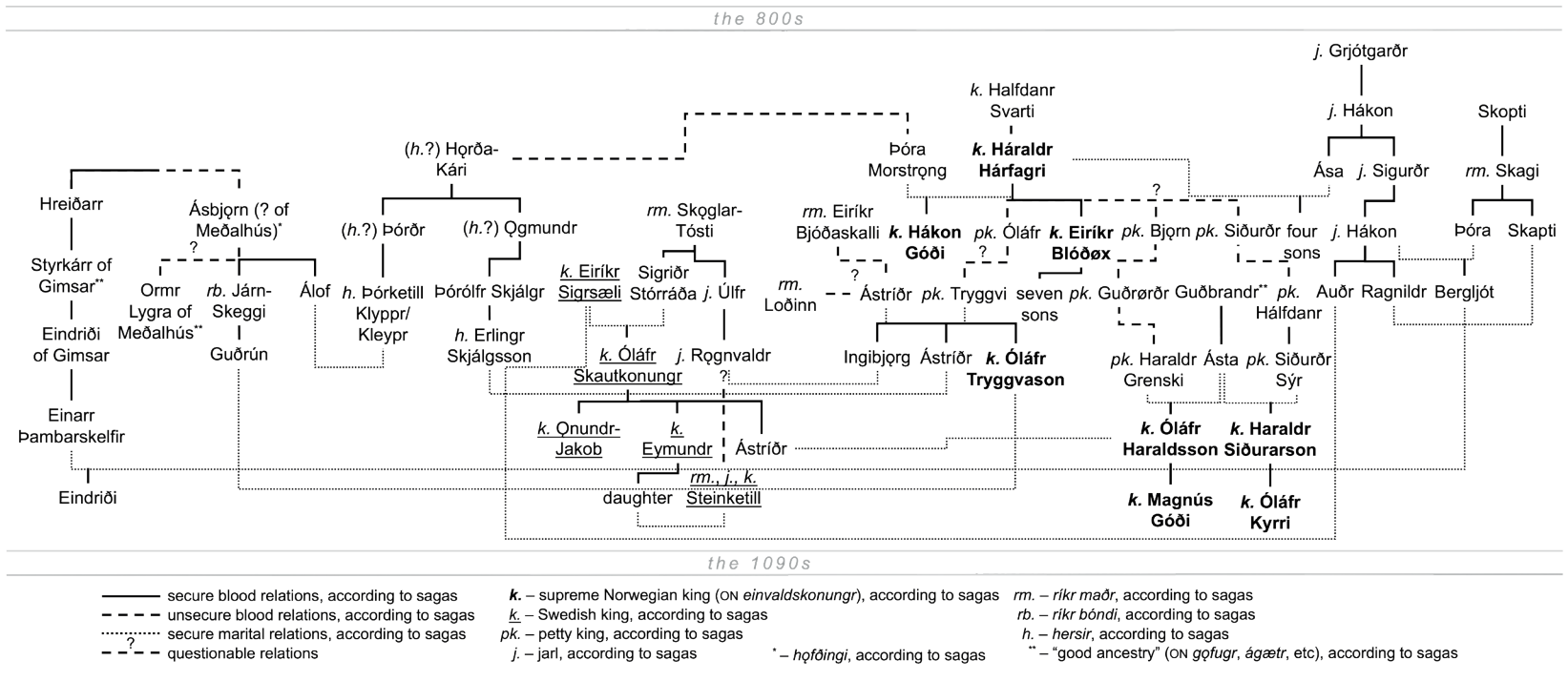

Figure 8. Select schematic genealogy[1858] of the Viking-Age top players, mentioned in §4.4.3 (predominantly Norwegian), in the "political game", as defined by Sverre Bagge

1858 For the sake of clarity, the chart omits many otherwise known (as well as most probably legendary) figures, their relationships, and progenies, such as sons of Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson. Some connexions are less securely reconstructed than others: 1) Loðinn and Ástríðr: according to *Heimskringla*, Eiríkr Bjóðaskalli was Ástríðr's father and Loðinn was her 'wealthy and of good family' (*víkverskr, auðigr ok ættaðr vel*) second husband (*ÓlTrHkr*, chap 52, p. 301), but Oddr the Monk believed Loðinn had been her father (*ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 26, p. 221); 2) Jarl Rǫgnvaldr and King Steinketil (r. 1060–1066): tentnative identification rests on *Hervarar Saga*, chap 11, p. 62; 3) Ásbjǫrn of Meðalhús: in the chart it is assumed that he was the same person named in *Heimskringla* in connection with Hǫrða-Kári's clan (*HaGrHkr*, chap 14, p. 218), as it eliminates one too many powerful namesakes at the time; his relationship with Ormr rests on their identification by their chief residence, Meðalhús; 4) Póra and Hǫrða-Kári: *Heimskringla* merely says that 'she was related' to him (*var í frændsemistǫlu við*; *HaHáFgHkr*, chap 37, p. 143).

menn.[1859] *Ríkismenn* and best sons of the *bændr* were said to have been recruted by Eysteinn Meyla (d. 1177), one of the pretenders to the throne in the 12th century.[1860] At the same time, save but one (perhaps, accidental) time in the mid-10th century,[1861] ON *lendir menn* in synoptic histories and *konunga sǫgur* first appear only in the reign of Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson.[1862] This expression henceforth becomes a standard designation of Norwegian aristocrats even before they formally commend themselves to the king later in a narrative. Sveinki Steinarsson is a good case in point: when he enters *Morkinskinna*'s narration, he gets introduced as one of the *ríkismenn* in the third person, but a *lendr maðr* in the mouth of King Magnús Berfœttr immediately after.[1863] This choice of words may be a reflection of the by then firmly entrenched conviction by Norwegian monarchs that *any* major political player in their realm was *ipso facto* their liegeman.

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In the long run, bigger players of the 10th – early 11th century, mentioned in the examined texts, dropped – or were – forced out. The Icelandic historical tradition ascribed the colonisation of the island to such expulsion by King Haraldr inn Hárfagri even before. Ásbjǫrn of Meðalhús's line, if the proposed prosopographical-genealogical reconstruction holds water, probably never recovered after Járn-Skeggi's demise. Hǫrða-Kári's lineage also disappears from record after the murder of Erlingr Skjálgsson by a relative of his in service of and against the will of King Óláfr Haraldsson. If veracious, Þrándr Haka's offspring – Ǫlvir from Eggja and two of his sons – were killed by King Óláfr Haraldsson, although it is rather likely that Grjótgarðr and Þórir Hundr's (other?) cousin never belonged to this family. They were eliminated nonetheless, though. All major Norwegian leaders who rose against King Óláfr Haraldsson were purged in the two following reigns. Hárekr of Þjótta was killed by Ásmundr Grankelsson in King Magnús inn Góði's reign with no repercussions. Kálfr Árnason fled under Magnús, as did Þórir Hundr.[1864] Kálfr then returned under King Haraldr Sigurðarson only to be sent on a suicidal military operation – his aggrieved brother subsequently defected to the Danish King Sveinn Ástríðarson and held under him the jarldom of Halland against the Norwegians.[1865] Einarr Þambarskelfir and his son were killed by King Haraldr Sigurðarson's men in *c.* 1050 AD in a fashion similar to the killing of Járn-Skeggi. Einarr's residence at Gimsar passed to new owners, one of whom, Gunnar, later supported King Magnús Blindi (r. 1130–1135 and 1137–1139) and died at the Battle of Minne in 1137 AD.[1866] Without a leader, the *lendir menn* and *bændr* did not dare revolt in spite of their animosity towards Haraldr, says *Heimskringla*.[1867]

Conversely, the appearance of ON *stór-/ríkir bændr* in texts seems non-coincidental. Some promoted *bændr* survived into the next century. As a spokesman for other *bændr*, the *gǫfugr*

1859 *Morkinskinna*, I, chap 38, p. 214.
1860 *Fagrskinna*, chap 127, p. 361.
1861 *HaGrHkr*, chap 11, p. 215.
1862 *Fagrskinna*, chap 22, p. 131; *ÓlTrHkr*, chap 42, p. 285; never occurs in *Ágrip*. *Egils Saga* may be brought as evidence to the contrary, for it consistently calls Norwegian kings' liegemen of the 10th century ON *lendir menn*, but on the strength of the collocation's first securely dated appearance in King Óláfr Haraldsson's reign (above, n. 1336), this may be a matter of an anachronistic linguistic *usus*.
1863 Sveinki is a somewhat vague character, and his origins and source of power are fully lost to history (Halvorsen 1976, p. [12]).
1864 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 106, p. 177 (reproduced in *ÓlHlSer*, chap 93, p. 260).
1865 *HaSigHkr*, chap 53, pp. 134–135.
1866 *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 95, p. 180.
1867 *HaSigHkr*, chap 44, p. 126.

bóndi Brynjólfr Úlfaldi submitted Ranríki (present-day Ranrike, the northern half of present-day Bohuslän) to the Norwegian king at an assembly. Brynjólfr became King Óláfr Haraldsson's *lendr maðr* and, in later terms, his *sverðtakari* by accepting a gilded sword and was awarded an estate at Vettaland.[1868] Brynjólfr's son Halldórr is described as a great leader (ON *høfðingi mikill*),[1869] his grandson still owned Vettaland,[1870] and their family kept their high status in the 12th century. An important *lendr maðr* in Þrándheimr, Sigurðr Ullstrengr (*c.* 1030 – *c.* 1100), was a son of Loðinn Viggjarskalli (lit. bald-headed man from Viggja, in the present-day Skaun commune in Trøndelag).[1871] This was almost certainly Loðinn of Viggja who in 1015 AD gave King Óláfr Haraldsson a boat with twenty rowing benches,[1872] or Loðinn's grandson of the same name.[1873] That is not to say, as some previous scholarship maintained, that King Óláfr Haraldsson was playing his newly promoted low-born appointees against old district chieftains. Rather, he seems to have exercised the classical divide-and-conquer policy indiscriminately of a target's background.[1874]

Over the 10th and 11th centuries, the Ynglingar–Hárfagri can be said to have been busy transforming Sverre Bagge's political game into one played by zero-sum rules. Political welfare (and with it, social prosperity), at least in theory, had to depend if not on the king's agency, then at least on his assent. In a pre-existing *heter*archy[1875] a sword from a king was a token of bilateral "friendship"[1876] and that could have been reciprocated by a "gift" (ON *gjǫf*) of a horse and silver.[1877] A magnate who received a king was a king's man just as much as the king was the host's. Such order of things went against the grain of the Ynglingar–Hárfagri's attempts to impose a, leastwise theoretical, topped by them *hier*archy of clients. In it, a sword from a king was a token of his lordship over his *sverðtakari*; a "gift" was a "tax" (ON *skatt*); and a host was at the king's mercy to be dispossessed or promoted.

4.4.3.4 from "liegemen" to "subjects"

Besides King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's semi-legendary oath to turn all Norwegians into his *thegns* (above, p. 293), the take-over of Jamtaland serves a neat illustration how tamed Scandinavian aristocrats became kings' *thegns*.[1878]

In the Viking-Age, Jamtaland is first mentioned as allegedly settled by the Þrœndir refugees from the semi-legendary King Eysteinn of Upplǫnd and Heiðmǫrk, presuma-

1868 *ÓlHlHkr*, chaps 61–62, pp. 79–82.
1869 *HaSigHkr*, chap 100, p. 200.
1870 *HaHerHkr*, chap 12, p. 361.
1871 *MaBerHkr*, chap 5, p. 214
1872 *ÓlHlHkr*, chap 40, p. 52.
1873 Skre 1998, p. 55; Røskaft 2003, p. 161. On Viggja itself, see the last-cited item, pp. 77–79.
1874 Andersen 1977, pp. 118–122, 281–282. *Cf.* Bagge 2010, p. 187 (with references to own earlier study) suggestion that Snorri Sturluson's implicit definition of aristocracy as the people connected to kingship was likely more reflective of his own time, and that in the 11th century rather, 'In most areas of the country, there must have been competition for leadership between several equally resourceful men. The kings could easily play off such men against each other...'.
1875 The select genealogical presentation of interpersonal connexions in Figure 8 illustrates how inclusive the power-holders' heterarchical social network was, as it included kings, petty kings, jarls, *hersar*, *gǫfgir/ríkir menn/bœndr*.
1876 Such as has been posited from archaeological evidence for Viking-Age Svíþjóð by Stjerna 2009 (specifically at p. 128). Political "friendship" in later medieval Scandinavia has been extensively researched by, e.g., Lars Hermanson (his list of relevant publications exceeds one footnote, but especially relevant in the present context is Hermanson 2011).
1877 *Landnámabók*, p. 361.
1878 A brief outline of Jamtaland's earliest history in English has been made available by Woolf 2007.

bly somewhen in the late 8th century, to believe *Heimskringla*'s retrospective chronology. According to the same source, thereafter, King Hákon inn Góði established peace and trade contacts with this land and friendship with its *ríkismenn*. In return, they travelled to personally bend the knee before him, promised him tributary payments (ON *skattgjǫf*), and became his *thegns* (*þeir* […] *gerðusk hans þegnar*). *Heimskringla* ascribes this decision of theirs to the good reports on Hákon.[1879] The veracity of any of these events is rendered dubious by *Fagrskinna*'s statement that,

> King Eysteinn [Magnússon] was the first king of Norway to bring Jamtaland under his rule.[1880]

So, just as in case of Upplǫnd and King Haraldr inn Hárfagri (see above, n. 1627), *Heimskringla* is again suspect of duplicating a historical fact, and the supposed Þrœndalǫg origin of settlers of a device to legitimise Norwegian royal claims to overlordship.

At any rate, the status of this limitrophe province apparently fluctuated until at some point the Swedish kings, potentially first Óláfr Skautkonungr, established their own interests here. We are told that King Eysteinn Magnússon, as already mentioned, annexed Jamtaland by exchanging gifts with the "wisest and most prominent" Jamtalanders (ON *inir vitrastir ok mestir menn*), securing their friendship, and by pure force of cajoling. There have been preserved at least three prose accounts of this event, all three clearly interconnected but written with minor details that will be most illustrative for the focal case of the current section. The earliest of the three, *Morkinskinna*, keeps "the wisest Jamtalanders" the grammatical subject throughout.[1881] The slightly later *Heimskringla* changes the wording only a little but in a very illustrative manner. *Heimskringla* has the king befriend 'all the people that were in authority in the land'.[1882] These, crucially and in good accord with §4.4.3.2, were turned by the pen of the *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*'s reworker (after 1280 AD) into "all *høfðingjar* in the land and *ríkir bœndr*".[1883] In *Morkinskinna*'s version, "the wisest Jamtalanders" then returned home, convinced the people of the province (ON *landslýðr*) to agree to the royal proposition, took their oaths, returned to the king, and "swore Jamtaland to King Eysteinn" (*svǫrðu Eysteini konungi Jamtaland*). In course of all these negotiations, *Morkinskinna* says, all Jamtalandic *lendir menn* (*sic*) travelled to the king, "swore Jamtaland" (*sic*) with all its revenues/taxes (ON *skatt*) as well, and became his *thegns* (*gerðusk hans þegnar*). In return, King Eysteinn promised them, just as the Norwegians "or his other *thegns*" (*eða ǫðrum sínum þegnum*), defence from the Svíar. *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*'s version abbreviates *Heimskringla*, which itself explains that in order to 'hand over all their land to the rule of King Eysteinn', the Jamtalandic *ríkismenn* 'took oaths of loyalty from all the people' and then returned and "swore him the land".[1884]

Whether or not the events unfolded in this exact manner is less important than what these narratives have to say about the (theoretical and idealised) relationship between kings and (provincial) elites. King Eysteinn Magnússon's depiction is doubtless that of an exemplary monarch whose power stems from the bottom up and who rules with a *consen-*

1879 *HáGóHkr*, chap 12, p. 165.
1880 *Eysteinn konungr kom Jamtalandi undir sik fyrstr Nóregs konunga* (*Fagrskinna*, chap 92, p. 320).
1881 *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 71, pp. 101–102.
1882 *…þá menn, er réðu fyrir landinu* (*MaSonHkr*, chap 15, p. 255).
1883 *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, chap 128, p. 184 (ll. 18–19).
1884 *Dró svá saman þeira félagsskap, at Jamtr gáfu land allt undir ríki Eysteins konungs. Tóku fyrst til þessa máls ríkismenn þar trúnaðareiða af ǫllu fólkinu, síðan fóru þeir til Eysteins konungs ok sóru honum land…* (*MaSonHkr*, chap 15, pp. 255–256).

sus fidelium.[1885] It transpires, though, that the notion of a king's subject, so well-attested for ON *þegn* in the Old Norse–Icelandic prose (above, §4.3.2.2), ought to have in origin been a notion of an autonomous local aristocratic landed proprietor who (initially voluntarily) submits himself to a royal authority. Their relationship is initially of contractual nature: the aristocrat pledges fealty and tribute (or tax) from his/her pre-owned land;[1886] the king in return promises good governance and military support. The model of interaction between the Jamtalanders and King Eysteinn, as well as the syntactical construction used, further adds weight to the suppositions expressed above (p. 259) regarding the ON formula *at sverja land ok þegna*.

As previously mentioned, already King Haraldr inn Hárfagri is said to have putatively sworn to make all Norwegians his *thegns*. In an earlier, and in this instance shorter, redaction of the same *Fagrskinna*, this legend is lacking and instead the king is attributed a vow to 'receive[...] tribute from every inland valley and outlying headland' in Norway.[1887] Already the earliest Icelandic histories contain anecdotes of him doing so in respect of some members of the contemporary elite: singled out were Ketill Flatnef and Ásgrímr Úlfsson.[1888] With due appreciation for the detailed process of annexing Jamtaland, Haraldr was apparently thought to have designed his relationship with other players in Sverre Bagge's political game in the same image and likeness as King Eysteinn Magnússon. How much this was a later retrospective projection and how much a historical fact may be discussed. At any rate, King Eysteinn's co-optation of the Jamtalandic elites by means of *thegnship* probably had a one-hundred-year older precedent during the reign of King Óláfr Haraldsson. According to his biographical sagas, probably *c.* 1022 AD, he sent one Þórarinn Nefjólfsson to the Icelanders, represented by an elite and general populace, with an offer of friendship and proposition to enter a lord–*thegn* relationship:

> 'Four nights since I parted from King Óláfr Haraldsson. He sent greetings to this land to all the leading men and rulers of the country and as well to all the population of men and women, young and old, rich and poor, from God and himself, adding that he wishes to be your lord, if you are willing to be his *thegns*,[1889] and each to be friends of the other and

1885 I owe this observation to Lars Hermanson (personal communication, 17 January 2024).

1886 *Cf.* the details in *Hákonar Saga Hákonarson* when it speaks about the annexation of Iceland: *Eftir þetta var skipuð lögrétta, ok sóru flestir hinir b e z t u b æ n d r ór Norðlendingafjórðungi ok af Sunnlendingafjórðungi fyrir útan Þjórsá Hákoni konungi l a n d o k þ e g n a o k æ v i n l i g a n s k a t t með slíkum skildaga sem bréf þat váttar er þar var eftir gert* ('After that the Court of Laws was held; and most of the b e s t m e n out of the Northerners' quarter took the oath, and of the Southerners those east of Thjorsa, and gave over t h e l a n d a n d i t s l o r d s a n d a n e v e r l a s t i n g s k a t t [= tax, tribute] to king Hacon, on such terms as those letters bear witness which were written afterwards'; *HákHák*, chap 374, p. 223; my emphasis).

1887 *…hann hefir skatt af hverjum uppdal sem af útnesi* (*Fagrskinna*, chap 3, p. 66). *Ágrip* (chap 1, p. 3) contains not even this abbreviated episode and instead provides a different interpretation of the king's nickname (as does the Latin *Historia Norwegie*), explained by *Fagrskinna* as coined after Haraldr eventually cut his hair, having fulfilled his conqueror's promise.

1888 *Landnámabók*, pp. 50–51, 358–362: in the, probably apocryphal, former case, Ketill Flatnef (married to a *hersir*'s daughter, one must add) refused to pay the agreed upon tax from the Hebrides, and King Haraldr consequentially confiscated Ketill's Norwegian properties (ON *eignir*) and exiled his son; in the latter case, a son of a *ríkr hersir* in Þelamǫrk, Ásgrímr Úlfsson, refused to pay tax as he had been ordered to, because he had never paid one, but instead Ásgrímr had sent the king a horse and silver as a "gift", which still did save him from execution.

1889 *Óláfs Saga Helga in Sérstaka*, where this episode can also be found, reads ON *þjónar* in place of *þegnar* in AM, MS 75a fol.

> supporters in all good enterprises.' People responded well to his speech. Everyone said they would gladly be friends of the king, if he would be a friend of the people of this country.[1890]

The outcome of this negotiation may have been *Óláfsløg* with its acknowledgement of the Icelanders' *høldar*'s rights in Norway (above, n. 1702), or at least this is what *Grágás* compilators believed or wanted others to believe. With the two-hundred-year younger sagas, it is unknowable if these interactions indeed were couched in such terms. But it is not impossible. First, Þórarinn's words are formulated in the language of a typical royal address found in, for example, royal law amendments and evidently imitating a contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon writ praxis,[1891] although his message may have just as well been oral.[1892] Against the supposition that it was copied from 13th-century models speaks the very contents. As discussed in Chapter 3 and evinced by preserved Norwegian medieval royal addresses, kings' *thegns* always were the intended audience, and it is exactly what King Óláfr Haraldsson was negotiating through Þórarinn: the Icelanders' king's *thegns*' status as recipients of the address. But even more the reliability of this relationship is corroborated by Óttarr inn Svarti's already mentioned skaldic *Høfuðlausn* addressed to Óláfr:

> Trustworthy one, you hold fittingly onto the power of good kings of the people; the Shetlanders are known to you as your thanes. No battle-bold king who subjugated under himself the islands in the west arose east in the land, before we got you.[1893]

As noted by Matthew Townend in his commentary for *SkP*, in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* this particular stanza is quoted in the context of Óláfr's violence-free spread of domination in the Norse-speaking colonies abroad through co-opting insular jarls. It is therefore entirely plausible that a lord–*thegn* relationship, minutely exemplified in prose by the case of Jamtaland, had already been in the kings' toolkit for co-opting elites as far back as the 1020s. It could have been employed even in the late 990s, if the *Greatest Saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason* did not allow conceptual anachronisms in the following (no doubt invented) speech by the king at an assembly in Þrándheimr:

> Now, as this people is without a head, and has for a long time past endured wrongful rule and authority, I willingly offer myself, in response to the request of many *høfðingjar* and *ríkismenn*, to be your King if you will be my *thegns*. On several grounds I think that an alliance between us will not be unsuitable, for we may thereby strengthen and support each other in a right course of conduct.[1894]

1890 *„Ek skilðumk fyrir fjórum nóttum við Óláf konung Haraldsson. Sendi hann kveðju hingat til lands øllum høfðingjum og landsstjórnarmønnum ok þar með allri alþýðu karla ok kvinna, ungum manni ok gømlum, sælum ok veslum, guðs ok sína, ok þat með, at hann vill vera yðarr dróttinn, ef þér vilið vera hans þegnar, en hvárir annarra vinir ok fulltingsmenn til allra góðra hluta." Menn svøruðu vel máli hans. Kváðusk allir þat fegnir vilja at vera vinir konungs, ef hann væri vinr hérlandsmanna* (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 125, p. 215; recycled verbatim from *ÓlHlSer*, chap 114, p. 326–327; for ease of illustration, I allowed myself to swap 'subjects' in the original translation for "*thegns*").

1891 Harmer 1989, pp. 4–5.

1892 Wellendorf 2019, pp. 117–118, argues from King Óláfr Haraldsson's oral reply to King Cnut's (putative) sealed letter and the first mention of a Norwegian king's own letter only in the next reign that Óláfr did not yet use this form of communication.

1893 *Gegn, (eru þér at þegnum) þjóðskjøldunga góðra haldið hæft á veldi (Hjaltlendingar kenndir). Engi varð á jørðu ógnbráðr, áðr þér nø ðum, austr, sás eyjum vestan, ynglingr, und sik þryngvi* (Ótt *Hfl* 20).

1894 *Nv með þvi at þetta folk er høfðingia laust en hefir þolat aðr lengi rangligt Riki ok yfir boð. þa vil ek bioþaz til eptir þvi sem margir h ø f ð i n g i a r o k R i k i s m e n n hafa aðr beiðt at geraz yðvaR konungr ef þer vilit vera minir þegnar. Syniz mer sva fyrir sumra luta sakir sem uart sam felagh væri eigi v makligt at huarir mætti aðra styðia ok styrkia til rettra fram ferða* (*ÓlTrMest*, chap 105, p. 240; my emphasis and minor lexical alterations in the original translation).

With further spreading, ON *þegn*'s conceptual guise started to include even those (free) people who did not personally swear fealty in the king's presence or symbolically received/touched his sword. With this status becoming non-negotiable and ascribed so that high medieval Norwegian kings were supposed to take a coronation oath before everyone in their *thegnship*, 'born and unborn',[1895] the sense "liegeman" must have gradually evolved into "subject". In the words of *Konungs Skuggsjá* ("The King's Mirror"), a *bóndi*, when called upon to steer the king's warship,

> [...] must attend, though he be the king's henchman [*handgenginn* = liegeman] only so far as he is his subject [*þegn*].[1896]

From this moment on, by and large, whereas the supposedly Viking-Age *Óláfslǫg* 'present[ed] a mutual balance between duty and privileges',[1897] the relationship medieval *thegnly* subjects enjoyed with the Crown in prose texts appears reciprocal but inevitably asymmetrical.

In them, kings take upon themselves the role of a benevolent patron, arbitrator, and defender. *Thegns* receive royal pledges to uphold justice and benefit from (supposedly) good laws.[1898] *Thegns* are protected from ecclesiastics' arbitrariness ,[1899] including attempts at deceit and money extortion. [1900] On a few occasions, a monarch does not intervene directly, but saga-writers ascribe to those who get excommunicated the sentiment of being mistreated particularly as royal subjects.[1901] Royal authority restrains both commoners[1902] and powerful men, including royal retainers, from mistreating[1903] or assaulting kings' *thegns* domestically.[1904] Providing defence against foreign raiding is also the kings' obligation towards their *thegns*.[1905] In return, perhaps before all things, kings expect an oath of loyalty from their *thegns*.[1906] Kings proselytise Christianity, uphold it among their *thegns*,[1907] and command them obedience towards appointed ecclesiastics.[1908] Kings exhort their *thegns* to respect the rule of law,[1909] to which they are subject, and prohibit legal machinations.[1910] Kings may demand a levy from their *thegns*' property and in time of war even commandeer

1895 …*við þa alla er* [*i hans þægnskylldu ero* [*allna ok oborna* (*LL*, Kristendomsbolken §11, I, p. 198).
1896 …*værðr hværr at fara er til værðr næfndr. þo at hann se ægi handgengenn. at aðru en þægn hans* (*Skuggsjá*, chap 55, p. 42).
1897 Boulhosa 2005, p. 85.
1898 *NGulL* §5, p. 309; *HákHák*, chap 221, pp. 48–49, and chap 349, p. 190; *Hirðskrá* §3 (6), p. 70; *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §8, I, p. 195 (recycled in *ƷS* §10, p. 263); *ƷS* §11, p. 263; *EidL* §28:2, p. 64 (occurs in NB, MS 317 4°); *NikSgErkb II*, chap 166, p. 156.
1899 *Lögmanns-Annáll* and *Flatø-Annaler*, *s.a.* 1269/1270 AD (pp. 276 and 388, accordingly).
1900 *Sverris Saga*, chap 122, p. 188. The protection of *thegns*' interest in this episode is utilised by King Sverrir for his political gain (insubordination to a papal legate and his subsequent extradition). Sverrir's sincereness in upholding his subjects' welfare may be questioned, but important is that the through and through sympathetic to the king author considered it appropriate in political manoeuvre.
1901 *Árna Saga*, chap 123, p. 171; *Lárentíus Saga*, chap 8, p. 233–234.
1902 *BæjrL*, Farmannalov §14, p. 280.
1903 *Hirðskrá* §31 (36), p. 136.
1904 *ÞorSgSk*, chap 374, p. 20–21; *Hirðskrá* §29 (34), p. 16, and §35 (40), p. 148; *Gísls Þáttr*, chap 11, p. 86; *Ljósvetninga Saga*, chap 19, p. 97.
1905 *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 81, p. 103.
1906 *LL*, Kristendomsbolken §12, I, pp. 204–210 (reproduced in *ƷS* §13, p. 264).
1907 *ÓlTrOdMunk*, chap 19, p. 189–190; *BarƷosSg*, chap 178, p. 167.
1908 Árna Saga, chap 8, p. 14.
1909 *LL*, Prologue, I, p. 109.
1910 King Magnús Hákonarson's law amendment, 13 September 1277 AD (no. 4 in *NGL* II, p. 482).

it.[1911] Kings can assign and demand services from their *thegns*: to travel on a diplomatic mission, pilot a warship, assist a king's emissary in exacting justice.[1912]

4.5 Conclusion: The Sociology of a Scandinavian *Thegn*

After §4.3 re-examined and charted the contextual meanings of ON *þegn*, in course of §4.4, a controlled approximation of what and who a *thegn* could have been in the late Viking Age has been attempted. The analysis relied on a maximum range of available sources and generally, with minor exceptions, avoided parallel Anglo-Saxon vernacular and Latin texts. Despite the breadth of the study, the results must retain a degree of tentativeness, for they by necessity proceed from educated extrapolations from later Old Norse–Icelandic texts. Most brought forward cases related to Norway under the Ynglingar–Hárfagri kings and their interactions with the topper elites. But overall, and with the pointed out in the introduction to §4.4 hints at a wider sociolinguistic Scandinavian continuum, together they seem to fit together and sit rather well with the otherwise scholarly reconstructed conditions of the Viking Age.

The proposed answers to the lexicographical research Question 1 arrived at in §4.3 closely align in the observation that, as regards the actual social conditions examined throughout §4.4 to address the research Question 2, in the semiotic triangle (above, p. 32), ON *þegn* was a shorthand symbol for a self-standing social concept and pertinent referents and just as much as for a concept conditioned by a relation to kingship.

4.5.1 Thegn *not Conditioned by Kingship*

In the social practice of its time, ON *þegn* applied to a broad elite in the social, legal, and economic spheres. It could pass under many native names (ON *stór-/ríkir/beztir bændr/menn*, *stór-/ríkismenn*, *gǫfugmenni*, *høfðingjar*, *hǫldar* et al.) depending on the intended nuances. Its unifying social features were domination of lower strata through extraction of income from dependent workers, political entitlement, association with an aristocratic type of landed property (allegedly manifested by mounds): odal.

The last-mentioned, in what few accounts we have, must have been this elite's economic powerbase, which also intrinsically safeguarded social prevalence by virtue of an organic merge with entitlement to full(er) legal rights and compensations. This follows from the poets Sigvatr and Arnórr's stanzas that explicitly make the Norwegian *thegns*' odals an object of either a disapproved of royal encroachment, or, conversely, of a praised imposition of rulership. The rank-and-file *bændr*'s holdings could probably have just as well attracted the name "odal". But the Oddernes rune stone suggests, from the mention of a church built on one's odal, that in the Viking-Age (above, p. 291), ON *óðal* was probably more appropriate for aristocratic properties. Similarly, Sigvatr's stanzas clearly indicate that King Magnús inn Góði was appropriating land from the topper echelons (ON *bændr gǫfgir*), as does the surrounding prose context in which the king's wrath was aimed at

> [...] many distinguished men in Þrœndalǫg [...] such as Kálfr Árnason [...] so that some lost all their property, others left the country, as Kalfr did, and some paid fines.[1913]

1911 *Árna Saga*, chap 110, pp. 157–158.
1912 *Skuggsjá*, chap 55, p. 42; *Hirðskrá* §40 (44), p. 158.
1913 *…margir gǫfgir menn í Þrœndalǫgum* […] *sem var Kálfr Árnason* […] *svá at sumir létu alla eign sína, ok enn fleiri stukku ór landi, svá sem Kálfr, en sumir guldu fé* (*Morkinskinna*, I, chap 4, pp. 29, 30–31). *EGulL* §12, pp. 38–39, also

It further receives corroboration from a subsequent look into the legal – ascribed or achieved – status of later Norwegian owners of odals, the *hǫldar*, who in the Viking Age, it has been surmised, used to be (petty) magnates. Later in the Gulathing law-province, only the *hǫldar* bore testimonies in cases about odal; in the Frostuthing law-province, the *hǫldar* were among obligatory compurgators in serious crimes that required a twelvefold oath (such as treason, murder, truce breaking, arson) and punishable by outlawry. In Iceland, where the earliest extant written law, as modern historians have it, did not differentiate free people's legal ranks, when in a dozen, *thegns* took the role of verdict-makers on resonant cases, of witnesses when in pairs, and of judges in confiscation courts.

It was probably the upper strata of these very odal-born lords, representative of the wider populace as many elites are, with whom Norwegian kings/jarls interacted most, and who sponsored runic memorials commemorating them as "(very) good" or even "best" or "first among *thegns*".[1914] It should thus follow, on balance, that the wider ranks of Scandinavian *thegns* seem to have belonged instead to the lower tiers of the Viking-Age elite. In the late 9th century, a household of a prominent Norwegian *hersir*'s son supposedly included a (long?) hundred freed persons or more; a son of a petty Norwegian king emigrated with eighty. The leading magnate in the same region a century later normally surrounded himself with a retinue of ninety, and a 13th-century *goði* and *beztr búþegn* with fifteen and often more (above, p. 250). Accordingly, one can suppose that a "median" Viking-Age *thegn* could command a clientele of perhaps a dozen or so.[1915]

In the absence of written census data (or similar) it is difficult to approximate the population percentage the discussed social category of *thegns* took up in Viking-Age society as a whole. Observations by Michael Gelting, Bjørn Poulsen, and Sverre Bagge should be re-iterated, namely that, however numerically large or small, it was this category who steered the society at large and that up until later, aristocracy was practically distinguished from the rest only by a lifestyle maintained by various dependents (above, pp. 19, 30, and n. 1328).[1916] With no, at the moment of writing, scholarly consensus about how much the earliest *Provincial Laws* captured a socio-economic residual of the (late) Viking Age, such allodiaries' eventual fate as a whole, apart from those individually named and co-opted by kingship, is hard to outline too. *Frostuþingslǫg*'s mention of a meagre number of *hǫldar* per *fylki*[1917] and, against it, lack of any free people but the *hǫldar* in *Borgarþingslǫg* and *Eiðsivaþingslǫg*, could signal a progressive dilution of the erstwhile magnates in the growing strata of their (former) freed people. Or rather, it can testify to the inherent paucity of the odal-born in proportion to other strata and relevant to the pre-medieval era as

speaks of proprietary churches in Western Norway, built by individual *lendir menn* and *bændr*. Though this stipulation mentions some other undisclosed people who might build a church (*hverr sem kírkiu gerír*), because the ultimate penalty for undue maintenance was land forfeiture to the king, it seems unreasonable that the late Ynglingar–Hárfagri and their successors targeted and had administrative capacities to oversee small holdings.

1914 "Best *thegn*": AUD1995;279 and Sm 35; "first among *thegns*": DR 277.

1915 Retinues of housecarls of unspecified numbers are also reported about the Icelandic *góðir búþegnar* Þórgils Márrsson and Helgi Snorrason (*Fóstbræðra Saga*, chaps 7, 12, pp. 147–148, 181–182), who lived in the first half of the 11th century. Since at least three of Þórgils's housecarls from his *lið* were killed alongside with him in a confrontation over a stranded whale, the assumed numerical range seems reasonable.

1916 Elaborated on by Bagge 2010, pp. 119–120.

1917 The law recused 'kinsmen by marriage' and 'enemies' to either party (…*hvárki sculo til nemder sifiaðer ne sacaðer*; *FrostL* IV §8, p. 160). Hence, Gurevich's exclamatory insistence on the *hǫldar*'s exclusive paucity off this evidence (Gurevich 2009, p. 276) may deserve some toning down.

well. Maybe, it does both. If it did, it could balance some potential contradictions. The *thegns*' elevation in the skaldic poetry as odal proprietors in the 1040s is reinforced in the 1200s by legal stipulations on the matter and Snorri's glosses. But in same laws, *thegns* are contrasted with the rest of populace as only socio-economic rather than legally distinct, which is reflected in frequent laudatory and superlative adjectival qualifications before ON *bóndi* and *þegn* whenever texts mean an elite. Essentially, the uncertainty loops back to the problem of the social pyramid steepness and framework a heterarchichal "society of freeholders". Solving it goes beyond the ambition of the author and, with only much later native fiction, legal, and documentary prose available, can be approached from the premises of neighbouring historical disciplines.

4.5.2 Thegn *Conditioned by Kingship*

The same social category seems to have been the source for the Moscian "ruling" or "political class" (above, p. 24) and also kings' pool of agents, although it probably applies more to their upper crust. In course of this period, from what we can tell, kings generally put effort into turning the former into the latter with the help of the carrot-and-stick policy in handling their *thegns*. This process is best recorded in the native sources for Norway and, sadly, mostly for the top(per) ranks of the political elite. The general trend in the suggested tug of war between the Ynglingar–Hárfagri and various aristocratic lords was in as much as possible taming of the latter by the former through all available means. That people from the echelons further down truly kept up with such decision-makers appears not to be the case in the sources that paint such groups more as an entitled but *re*active collective rather than individual *pro*-active agents in the own right.

There are some – few but nevertheless telling – literary instances that leave no doubt that Norwegian kings did perceive or termed their subordinates as their *thegns*. This seems to hold both in regard to individuals, as evinced by the legend of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri becoming King Æthelstan's *thegn*, and to groups, as suggested by the legend of the same Haraldr promising to make all Norwegians his *thegns* and Kings Óláfr Haraldsson and Eysteinn Magnússon actually turning regional bodies politic into royal *thegns*. From this notion, it is argued, later proceeded the inclusion of *all* legally free and entitled people under the umbrella concept of a "king's *thegn*".

That such re-conceptualisations were not impossible can be gathered from a precedent in the Carolingian era. Frankish texts feature a polysemantic Latin lexeme *leudes/leodes* (≺ PGMC **liudīz*, lit. people; *cf.* ON *lýðir*, OHD *liuti*, OS *liudi*, OE *leode* and Slavonic cognates) with three meanings.[1918] One definitely refers to *leudes* as kings' *comitatus* companions, although, as mentioned by Franz Irsigler, they 'were not simple followers, but lords of followings in the service of the king'.[1919] Thus, Gregory of Tours (538–594) narrated how King Clovis (r. *c.* 466–511) sent gifts to his rival Ragnachar's *leudes* so that they would urge Clovis to invade Ragnachar's realm. The second meaning makes LAT. *leudes/leodes* synonymous with the concept of a *wergild* – for example, *Lex Salica* alone and associated documents attest at least four such cases.[1920] This immediately recall the ON compound *þegngildi* discussed above (§4.3.2.3). Finally, LAT. *leudes/leodes* can denote "people" in general, though there

1918 Studied extensively by von Olberg 1991, §4.2.1.2.
1919 Irsigler 1978, p. 123.
1920 Drew 1991, pp. 117, 165, 181.

is a tendency in modern literature to see it more as "subjects." For example, decreeing a capitulary for the keeping of the peace, King Chilperic I (r. 561–584) and his *optimates* and *antrustiones* agreed that they 'would grant the betrothal fine (*reipus*) to all our men (*leodibus*)'.[1921] Apparently, the transition occurred along the line from "personal retainer" to "impersonal subject," and not the other way around. Dennis Green laid out a plausible reconstruction of how this might have happened:

> What had earlier been a personal relationship – reciprocal as in the feudal bond and applied only to those who were on close terms with the king, the *leudes* – has here [i.e. mid-9th century] been converted into a more impersonal relationship between the ruler and his subjects of free birth, in which no such reciprocity is involved. Exactly how such a change could be brought about has been shown by reference to the views of Jonas of Orléans which were accepted by the synod of Paris in 828–9, [...] for he maintains that the subject owes obedience to royal power because it is divinely ordained and that resistance to its orders is tantamount to resistance to the commands of God himself [...]. It is in clerical circles, then, and as a result of theocratic ideas that the personal and reciprocal relationship still obtaining in 802 is changed into the impersonal and unilateral bond of 854.[1922]

In Scandinavia with its late Christianisation, the formation of a royalist ideology, such as the one characteristic of *Hirðskrá* and *Konungs Skuggsjá*, began in earnest only in the second millenium AD and, by all accounts, after the end of the period this book is concerned with. But Green's model offers a good explanation of why notions of *thegns* as royal subjects never appear in the Viking-Age poetry. It also lends further support to Judith Jesch's conclusions that from a king's perspective, *thegns* as socio-political actors commemorated in runic inscriptions were imbued with 'resistance that must be crushed'[1923], and that 'the social structure that [*thegns*] represent was soon to fall to new ideas of kingship, aristocracy, and vassalage'.[1924]

4.5.3 Re-Enter Rune Stones

The linguistic and social nuances elucidated throughout CHAPTER 4 allow a re-connexion to the "Aakjærian–Nielsenist" (*alias* "camp vassalage" and "camp local leadership") controversy. In accordance with the methodology proposed in §1.7.1, this section will try the triangulation envisaged for the *third stage* of research and reliant on the synchronous but culturally mediated Anglo-Saxon and post-dating but culturally unmediated Scandinavian "vertices".

The "Aakjærian" suggestion to compensate for the wanting details in the runic inscriptions with the help of Old English material was ingenious and appropriate to the North Sea transregional Viking-Age chronotope. However, its main weakness is the persistent choice of just one lexical meaning of OE *þegn*. As outlined in §2.3.1, the choice stemmed from how it suited "grander narratives" of state building and motivated a whole separate lexicographical study of OE *þegn* in §3.3. The aid of modern and previously unavailable digitised corpora showed that OE *þegn*'s sense "royal liegeman" in Old English was neither

1921 Drew 1991, p. 149.
1922 Green 1965, pp. 85, 228–229. *Cf.* a most convergent view of Mitteis 1975, pp. 44–45 (pp. 43–44 in the original 1940/1953 German edition), as well as Ælfric's alteration between OE *leode* and *þegnas* in *Passion of St Edmund* (above, p. 133). The same topic is also raised by Esders 2021, pp. 189–190.
1923 Jesch 1994, p. 168.
1924 Jesch 2011, p. 43.

sole, nor arbitrary. It manifested itself through unequivocal syntaxis and context. Chapter 3 has demonstrated that through the expansion of royal discourse in the 10th century, OE *þegn* became unrestricted to solely those who personally served the Cerdicings and the word lost its previously mandatory genitival markers for wider social use. The same syntactical-contextual non-arbitrariness in recorded meanings can be said about ON *þegn* in skaldic and prose texts as well. "Royal liegeman" (as above, §4.3.2.1) as a suggested render for ON *þegn* on Danish and Swedish rune stones fails at both tests: genitival constructions that serve the *prima facie* touchstone for this sense are lacking, as are contextual or further give-aways, such as otherwise attested names of kings and/or *comitatus* activities.[1925]

The contention that laudatory adjectives substitute such give-aways appears ill-tenable. Laudatory epithets (ON *nýtr*, *fyrstr*, *snjallr*, *jafn*, etc.) are a commonplace in the runic commemorative formulae. About 14% of all commemorated are described that way, with the "good-man" (ON *góðr*, *algóðr*, *beztr*, *mjǫk góðr*, etc.) type appearing at least 263 times.[1926] As revealed by Lauren Goetting (see Vignette 2) in case of ON *drengr*, pairing with such qualifications was all too common in later prose, too, including non-royal contexts. Further still, §4.3.1.5 substantiates that "good *thegn*" similarly carried on into the written period as well. Rather than indicating an association with kingship, this fixed expression connoted a person of a socially approved demeanour and habitus fit for an aristocrat – quite as suggested by Hans Kuhn a long time ago (above, p. 65). People enrolled for communal juridical agency, apparently, assumed a specific legal *thegnly* identity (above, §4.4.1) as well, although it seems as if it was exactly their juridical agency that conferred them their *thegnship* and not necessarily the other way around. That ON *þegn* was by far not the first word of choice in respective legal stipulations and that the only narrative episodes of *thegns* in such capacities purport to relate to the first half of the 11th century, may indicate that ("good") *thegns* indeed originated in the runic period of Old Norse and were lexical fossils at the time of writing. And this study's failure to find ON *þegn* in thematic-rhematic constructions marking occupational status goes against the grain of commonly repeated interpretations that "*thegn*" used to be a title.

There still can be found more corroborative pro-"camp local leadership" evidence. The *thegn* Eyndr/Hvítr commemorated in the Smålandic inscription in Rörbro is commended for his good nature and generosity with food.[1927] For one, feasting is a traditional feature of a medieval aristocratic habitus in and of itself.[1928] For the other, munificence with eatables, besides many mentions in other, non-*thegnly*, runic inscriptions in Southern and Eastern

1925 Such as: *Væringr reisti stein eptir Þjalfa, bróður sinn, dreng þann, er var með Knúti* ('Væringr raised the stone in memory of Þjalfi, his brother, the valiant man who was with Knútr'; Ög 111), or *Ál/Áli/Alli lét reisa stein þenna eptir sik sjalfan. Hann tók Knúts gjald á Englandi. Guð hjalpi hans ǫnd* ('Ál/Áli/Alli had this stone raised in memory of himself. He took Knútr's payment in England. May God help his spirit'; U 194), or *Arnsteinn reisti stein þenna eptir Bjór, son sinn. Sá varð dauðr í liði, þá's Knútr sótti England. Einn er Guð* ('Arnsteinn raised this stone in memory of Bjórr his son who died in the retinue when Knútr attacked England. God is one'; N 184).

1926 Sawyer 2000, pp. 99–102, 107–111, 174–183.

1927 *Qzurr gerði kuml þessi eptir Eynd/Hvít, fǫður sinn. Hann var manna mestr óníðingr, var yndr matar ok ómunr hatrs. Góðr þegn Guðs trú góða hafði* ('Qzurr made these monuments in memory of Eyndr/Hvítr, his father. He was the most unvillainous of men; was liberal with food and oblivious to hate. A good Þegn, (who) had good belief in God'; Sm 37).

1928 See a special thematical issue of *ƒMH*, 37/1 (2011).

Scandinavia,[1929] is commended on as lordly behaviour of saga characters whose social power is not solicited from kings.[1930] An Icelandic contemporary of the runic *thegns*, Þórgils Arasson, was a son of one of about thirty "greatest chieftains" (ON *stærstir høfðingjar*)[1931] to be found in the country in *c.* 981 AD. Because of his willingness to provide food to any free person who would accept it so that his residence was thus filled with clients, Þórgils was remembered as a person of great *thegnship* (ON *mikill þegnskaparmaðr*).[1932] Generosity with 'both rich and poor' is attributed to Bernhard, the fifteenth bishop of Vestrgautland (in office *c.* 1206 – *c.* 1216 AD) and a "great *thegn*".[1933] "Good *thegns*" in Old Norse–Icelandic prose are attributed charitable social qualities and well-disposed temper, just like Eyndr/Hvítr. They are described as munificent hosts, whereas people not welcoming guests are styled "bad *thegns*". King Óláfr Haraldsson scoffed at one stay-at-home "petty *bóndi*" Karli, whose wife one the king's skalds seduced, by mockingly calling Karli an "able (ON *nýtr*) *thegn*".[1934] His *lausavísa* implies *a contrario* that an "able *thegn*" was rather a person of lordly behaviour and bearing. Then, the stone in Gunderup in Jutland commemorates a "good *thegn*" and his wife who, according to the inscription's testimony, lie in a nearby mound.[1935] Burial mounds, as has been argued, served important landscape markers of one's claim to ancestral property, the odal (above, §4.4.2.3). Encumbering or claiming it, in turn, served a sensitive source of tensions between the Ynglingar–Hárfagri kings and Norwegian aristocracy (above, §§4.4.2.1–2), and reliably so in the decades when *thegnly* rune stones were being erected. The idea that Jutlandic *thegns* solicited land *de novo* from the Jelling dynasty sits clearly at odds with this Norwegian parallel. If anything, they may have entered a notional *fief-de-reprise* type of association, as probably did their contemporary Þórsteinn Þóruson (*cf.* Niels Lund's idea: above, p. 67).

At the end of the day, in the contextualised choice between the suggested lexical meanings of ON *þegn* (above, §4.3), preference resides with those not conditioned by relationships with a royal power. The "good *thegns*" from rune stones resemble the Anglo-Saxon *thegnly* "honorary freemen" (who not infrequently attracted the same laudatory adjectives) much more than 'royal servants, members of the king's attendant nobility and of his hird or

1929 Sö 130, Sm 39, Sm 44, U 703, U 739, U 805†, DR 291, also potentially Sö 275, but the inscription is defective.

1930 E.g., *Bandamanna Saga*, chaps 1, 8, 10, pp. 294, 332, 353; *Njála*, chap 148, p. 425; *Eyrbyggja Saga*, chaps 8, 51, pp. 13, 144; *Færeyinga Saga*, chaps 16, 51, pp. 36, 108. Note how in *Brennu-Njáls Saga* (chap 47, p. 122) a character Gunnar accepts Njáll's gift of food and hay for animals but backs out of accepting Njáll's corollary monopoly on providing food, and in *Eyrbyggja Saga* (chap 31, p. 85) Þórólfr refuses a *goði*'s treat upon encounter, though he calls to his authority, and the same *goði* (chap 36, p. 97) provides another character with food and drink to attract his allegiance.

1931 *Kristni Saga*, chap 1 (published in ÍF XV, pp. 4–5). ON *stærstir høfðingjar* in this instance was a circumlocution for ON *goðar* as is evident from the known biographies of the named people. Þórgils's clan, seated in Reyk(ja)hólar, was one of the most distinguished medieval Icelandic families, and Þórgils was one of the ancestors of the historian Ari inn Fróði.

1932 *Grettis Saga*, chap 27, p. 91.

1933 *Christna Biscupär i Swerike*, p. 206.

1934 *Segið þat Karla, es komið þangat, nýtum þegni fyr norðan haf, at fleira skal í fǫrum vinna an hylda hval hvǫssum knífi* ('Say this [*lit.* that] to Karli, a handy *thegn*, north across the sea, when you get there, that [he] must do more on his travels than butcher whale with a sharp knife'; Ólhelg Lv 3). I allowed myself to change 'lad' in Russell Poole's original translation for "*thegn*".

1935 §A *Tóki reisti steina þessa ok gerði kuml þessi ept Apa/Ebba, mág sinn, þegn góðan, ok* §B *Tófu, móður sína. Þau liggja bæði í þeim haugi. Api/Ebbi unni Tóka fjár síns ept sik* ('§A Tóki raised these stones and made these monuments in memory of Api/Ebbi, his kinsman-by-marriage, a good þegn, and §B Tófa, his mother. Both of them lie in this mound. Api/Ebbi granted Tóki his wealth after himself'; DR 143).

bodyguard', as Svend Aakjær convinced many. Since, as Chapter 3 argues, such use in Anglo-Saxon social conceptual field spread from the Cerdicings' court and chancery, on certain conceptual levels all Anglo-Saxon landed proprietors could be said to have been royal agents, from some point onwards called *thegns*. §§3.4.6.2 and 5.2.1 problematise further how much such characters perceived themselves as such. Regardless, the discussed agency during the "second Viking Age" no longer presupposed personal interaction with the monarch as a *sine qua non* for every single one of them, but rather a general compliance with the political regime. If an English link is to be postulated (as does §5.3), rather than an imposition of a superstructure of the Jelling dynasty's retainers/liegemen over the basis of a "society of freeholders", runic *thegns* are probably more reflective of cultural contacts and spread of a prestigious social terminology that had already undergone some accommodation and re-interpretation in the "Danelaw".

Equally up for discussion is Karl Martin Nielsen's counterargument that *thegns* ought not to be interpreted as a "scant elite [and] limited social class", but rather that

> [a]s far as *þegn* is concerned, it is thus likely that it is generally used of the free allodial farmer, not particularly of the chieftain.[1936]

Nielsen referred to the Glavendrup stone (see Excursus 2) and argued that the high status of the commemorated individuals manifested itself not in ON *þegn* as such but rather in preceding approbative qualifications. This empiric observation of his could still benefit from some elaboration. Even on concession of egalitarianism greater than in continental Europe, while not one-to-one equivalents to feudal lords, these "free allodial farmers" in and of themselves already stood rather high in the "second-Viking-Age" society, which to a non-negligible degree was made of the unfree, freed, and semi-free. If the superlative or approbatory adjectives, as per Nielsen, indeed meant to distinguish those singled out from the rest, because of all what can be gathered about Scandinavian "good *thegns*" and their *thegnship* from later sources, runic *thegns* evidentially made up the top crust of this stratum. Contrarily, if such adjectival qualifications were simply formulaic, or, perhaps, signified the competition for prestige among peers, or catered to the sponsors' wishful presentation of their deceased relative, *thegns* definitionally enjoyed a high social standing relative to others.[1937] Either way, if anything, the individually known from runic inscriptions *thegns* were, in Nielsen's terms, *bondehøvdinger* (lit. householder chieftains).

This conclusion, however, even if self-sufficient, does not take into account the often pointed out geographical concentration of *thegnly* rune stones. Nor does it address how meanings firmly associated with kingship arose in the first place. Nor does Dennis Green's model say, how and why *thegns* were actors such as envisaged by Judith Jesch – i.e. independent of kingship – *before* the impersonal relationship could have developed. It may be here that the insistence on treating Britain and Scandinavia in the Viking Age together might be helpful after all. In seeking a possible tenable explanation, this book will in the following and concluding Chapter 5 turn an eye to England for the final time.

1936 'Hvad *þægn* angaar, er det saaledes sandsynligt, at det i det hele bruges om den frie odelsbonde, ikke specielt om høvdingen' (Nielsen 1945, p. 117).

1937 From a literary point of view, consider, for example, how the legendary Scyld Scefing is praised for his overlordly achievement as a "good king" (*Beowulf* [ll. 1–11]): supposing for the sake of the argument he did not go on conquering other lords, he would have still remained a king – a mediocre one, perhaps, and less praised, but a king nonetheless.

Excursus 2
Glavendrup Stone

Both "Aakjærian" and "Nielsenist" positions resorted among their arguments to the longest Danish Viking-Age inscription on a 188-cm tall three-face granite memorial located in Glavendrup (the north of the island of Funen [DAN. *Fyn*]) and recovered in 1806 (DR 209; Figures 9–10.[1938] This inscription differs from all other runic commemorations of *thegns* and is therefore worthwhile considering separately.

According to the current reading, the commemorated, one Alli *saulua* (the Pale? of the *Sølvir*? son of *Sølvi*?), was a '*goði* vial(i)þs honourable [lit. worthy of honour] *þegn*'. What ON *goði*, long before it resurfaces centuries later in Iceland,[1939] was supposed to mean on 10th-century Funen is up to discussions, including some that, by situating the Glavendrup memorial in a far wider context, interpret the available evidence quite broadly.[1940] Beside Glavendrup, the title *goði* finds only two other attestations in the runic material: DR 192 (Funen) and DR 190 (the Helnæs island south of Funen), with a third potential occurrence in Sm 144 (Småland).[1941] ON *lið* (lit. a semi-permanent household retinue)[1942] has incited many to place Alli in a martial context. If we understand him as a member of a *lið*, then it would be tempting to equate it with the royal *hirð* – a king's *comitatus*, – which would add grist to the "Aakjærian" mill.[1943] Most interpreters, though, would rather make Alli himself a head of a *lið*, ergo a chieftain surrounded by a warband, which advances the "Nielsenist" case.[1944] The latter understanding is hinted at in that the carver, Sóti, called Alli his lord (ON *dróttinn*). The runes that make up "via" (ᚿᛁᚼ) have posed just as much of a conundrum. Most popular are interpretations thereof as gen. plur. of ON *vi/vé* (lit. sanctuary, heathen shrine; probably connected to PGMC **wīha-*, lit. holy)[1945] which would accord with Alli's status of a *goði* who would combine secular and religious power. Other, more exotic readings have been proposed, for example, gen. Sing. of a common noun *wælið/wīalið* (ON *víglið*, lit. troop) or even a personal name *Wælið.[1946]

In the first century and a quarter of circulation in scholarly publications, transcriptions of the Glavendrup epitaph featured no *lið*. In June 1931, Erik Moltke and his assistant Anders Bæksted set out to the site and postulated that on face A, the gap between the runes **ɑ** (ᚫ) and **h** (ᚼ) contained three additional runes, **l** (ᛚ), **þ** (ᚦ), and **s** (ᛋ). The runes,

1938 RLGA XII, pp. 195–200 (*s.v.* "Glavendrup").
1939 Byock 1982, pp. 210–211; Sigurðsson 1999; Sundqvist 2016, pp. 56–57 *et passim*; Love et al. 2020, p. 127 (*s.v.* "goði").
1940 Cole 2020, pp. 195–200.
1941 Åkerström 2022.
1942 I owe this apt and concise definition to Larrea 2023, p. 22.
1943 E.g., Christensen 1945, pp. 33–35; Randsborg 1980, pp. 16, 31; Moltke 1985, pp. 285–286; Wickham 2005, p. 375.
1944 E.g., Lund and Hørby 1980, p. 57; Lund 1981, p. 30; (implicitly) Morris 1998, pp. 149–150; Syrett 1998, p. 252; Cole 2020, p. 192. In a way that eludes my understanding Christophersen 1982, p. 129, somehow combined both contra-directional interpretations into one and, to be true to his text, swapped *lið* for *hirð* (*cf.* below, n. 1946).
1945 Brink 2002, pp. 105–108 (esp. p. 106); Sundqvist 2016, pp. 131–132, 188, 297–298, 396.
1946 Andersen 1964. He also expressed an upfront opinion (at p. 23) that whatever ON *lið* is to mean in this inscription, the context does not presuppose equating it with ON *hirð*.

Moltke wrote, were "weak" (*svage*), but "*þ* is bomb-proof" (þ *er bombesikker*). He reported these findings to his patron, Lis Jacobsen. The same month, she included them in her newspaper publication[1947] and later had it reprinted with superb graphic reproductions and amended reading featuring *lið*;[1948] Moltke's own article came out a year later.[1949] Expectedly, Moltke, a convinced "Aakjærian", interpreted Alli as a member of the royal *comitatus*.

Moltke's reading was based on his pioneering photographic method with the help of artificial light that involved glass negatives and phosphorite. This technique, among other things, polemicised with the method formerly employed by the Danish runologist and linguist Ludvig Wimmer (1839–1920). Wimmer provided drawings of runic inscriptions of his papier-mâché casts (still kept in the Danish Royal Library) which he made during his field trips and thought his method to be neutral evidence. Lis Jacobsen's runological career was to a large extent built as an antithesis to Wimmer's authority. From Moltke's later oral testimony, she was very stubborn in giving up her ideas – to the extent that her and other editors' opposing views got enshrined in footnotes to the fundamental *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* (1941–1942). Unsurprisingly, Moltke's cutting-edge photographic method with extra light exposure evoked Jacobsen's enthusiasm, all the much so whenever it proved Wimmer wrong. In Glavendrup's case it certainly compromised his words that,

> [b]etween *uia* and *haiþuiarþan* there is not the slightest trace of runes to discover, and it is safe to assume that nothing ever stood here.[1950]

In the early 1980s, Moltke's reading was doubted. In an article on the bigger Jelling stone (DR 42), the Norwegian archaeologist Erling Johansen (1919–2000) and runologist Aslak Liestøl (1920–1983) had previously explained, including but not limited to, that the lack of text or ornament in the stone's upper part had been caused by a peel-off provoked by the carver's own work.[1951] Moltke countered with a comparison to the Glavendrup inscription where the gap between **ɑ** and **h** was, according to him, due to rotting and the same deterioration he held true for the Jelling stone.[1952] Johansen and Liestøl then travelled to Funen to examine the Glavendrup stone themselves and found neither signs of rotting, nor of **lþs**.[1953] Sadly, Liestøl died very soon after from cancer and the discussion faded away.

On 12 September 2020, Dr Michael Lerche Nielsen, Kamila Prins, and I performed a runological autopsy of the Glavendrup inscription *in situ*. Lerche Nielsen had previously discussed the issue with the Danish runologist, Marie Stoklund (1934–2021), and both sided with Johansen and Liestøl, but neither had put their doubts in print. The weather conditions at the time of our visit varied from rain to sunshine, i.e. we had the chance to examine the artefact in diverse lightings. Upon first-hand inspection, Lerche Nielsen opined that Wimmer had after all been correct: we three could not confirm any physical traces of **lþs**. I further took several coloured photographs of the suggested rotted spot at different angles and at different light without any additional light amplifications. Afterwards, I ran the images through photo-editing software and tried various enhancement techniques (ISO,

1947 Jacobsen 1931b.
1948 Lis Jacobsen 1931a.
1949 Moltke 1932.
1950 'Mellem *uia* og *haiþuiarþan* er der ikke det ringeste Spor af Runestave at opdage, og det tør sikkert antages, at der aldrig har staaet noget' (quote after Jacobsen 1931a, p. 12).
1951 Johansen and Liestøl 1977.
1952 Moltke 1979.
1953 Johansen and Liestøl 1983.

saturation, contrast, etc.) with only a negative result to Moltke's readings. Further, we compared the **ɑ**-to-**h** gap on face A (Figure 11) with a semi-damaged spot on face B that runs across lines 1 (*ala sunir karþu*) and 2 (*kubl þausi aft faþur*) and affects runes ᚾ, ᛋ, ᚿ in line 1 and ᚾ, ᚠ, ᛏ, ᚠ, ᚾ in line 2, accordingly (underlined; Figure 12). Here, the corruption to the inscription is undeniable and was indeed caused by a natural flaking off in the upper layer crust. This weathered down, flat and deeper in the surface region on face B shares no common physical features with the bosselated **ɑ**-to-**h** gap on the same level (or slightly protruding) as the rest of the surface on face A. In fact, on all of face A, this is the only spot of such uneven texture. Rather than rotting the simpler explanation must be that Sóti did not bother to even out this blemish unsuited for carving and just jumped over it. To corroborate these naked-eye observations, one will need to process the Glavendrup stone with a photogrammetric structure-from-motion (SfM) method and build a 3D-model to then process it using methods like Local Relief Modelling.[1954]

Moltke, so it would seem, considered his technique impeccable[1955] and held to his reading to the last and brought it into the dispute with Johansen and Liestøl. It would be utterly unfair to suspect Moltke of pareidolia. But the brutal truth may well be that he could have in good faith taken some natural shadows in his black-and-white pictures for a vague runic pattern. This is a speculation only, of course, and is no way meant as an argument *ad hominem* (see, for instance, the critique by Arthur Nordén of Erik Brate's erroneous reading of Ög 200: above, n. 7). Nevertheless, Moltke was surely right to conclude that,

> [t]he last words here, *uia lips*, have no obvious explanation.[1956]

In view of earlier interpretations of **kuþaskaki** in Sm 144 as a genitive personal name plus a nominative personal name (i.e. *Guða Skeggi*, "Skeggi son of Guði"),[1957] it may even not be fully excluded that **kuþa** in the Glavendrup inscription is part of a personal name, too (thus, e.g., Alli [son of] Sølvi [son of] Guði). I fully admit the tentativeness of such interpretation.

Whatever "via" and *goði* meant, we may need to sever the link between Alli and whosever troop.

A whole other matter is Alli's laudatory epithet **haiþuiarþan** (ᚼᚾᛁᚦᚢᛁᚾᚱᚦᚾᚾ, normalised to ON *heiðverðan*, acc. sing. of *heiðverðr*) and what place the person thus called held in the Danish social fabric of the time. In and of itself the adjectival compound poses no difficulty in translating. It breaks down into ON common masculine noun *heiðr* and adjective *verðr* (lit. worthy). The Swedish linguist Johan Palmér (1883–1956) reconstructed the original meaning of ON *heiðr* to be "lustre", "brightness" (SW. *glans*) and connected it with such cognates as OHG *heit* and OE *hād*. By the time of extant written records though, ON *heiðr* had already transitioned to mean "honour" (> SW./NORW. *heder*, DAN. *hæder*)[1958] and had also fossilised in a fixed collocation, ON duplet *heiðr ok éra*.

1954 Horn, Pitman, and Potter 2019.
1955 "...[b]ut it also serves to glorify the progress of the photographic art that a photograph of the stone shows not only runic traces but also legible runes" (*…men det tjener også til forherligelse af den fotografiske kunsts fremskridt, at et fotografi af stenen ikke blot viser runespor, men også læselige runer*; Moltke 1932, p. 85).
1956 Moltke 1985, p. 285.
1957 Åkerström 2022, pp. 95–96 *et passim*.
1958 Palmér 1931.

ON *heiðverðr* is extremely rare[1959] and could be a *tetrakis legomenon*. Beside the Glavendrup inscription, as has been long noted, it once comes up in *Vederlov* ("The Law of the Retainers"), once in *Skånske Lov*, and once in a Latin paraphrase of the latter source by Andreas Sunesen (*c.* 1167–1228), archbishop of Lund from 1201 AD. *Vederlov* is a family of closely related (? pseudo-)legislative texts extant in three versions: one Latin by Sven Aggesen (*c.* 1140×1150 – after 1187), one Latin by Saxo Grammarian (*c.* 1150 – *c.* 1220), and one Danish in no less than fourteen manuscripts from 1400–1650. Both Sven and Saxo presented *Vederlov* as an ostensible set of rules introduced by King Cnut for his court. Eric Christiansen persuasively demonstrated, however, that it is a product of fiction (not unlike the *Constitutiones de Foresta*, also ascribed to Cnut's reign for ideological purposes), and that the Danish rendition is a later reworking of Sven's text. Saxo's version leaves out the clause of our current interest and is further irrelevant. Sven's variant reads:

> Therefore it was enacted that the king with an army in attendance, or anyone else entitled to the same honour, should himself display the loyalty he demanded from them. He should present a cheerful countenance, and deny none of them a courteous reception.[1960]

The later Danish version rendered the actors in this bit as follows:

> That king and other *heiðverðar menn* who should have a *hirð*...[1961]

Skånske Lov (1202×1216 AD) mentions *heiðverðar menn* but once: it metes out a fine of three marks or a twelvefold purgatory oath (*cf.* §4.4.1.2, above) for instigating a *hethværthre man* to enter in another man's property without a due cause.[1962] Who such a person would be is subsequently explained only by Andreas Sunesen:

> [...] a rich and influential man [...] – a man of the sort we call *hetwarthre man* in the native language, whom it is not safe to resist either because of the distinction of his family or the dignity of his office.[1963]

In summation, all that can be gathered about ON *heiðverðar menn* is that this expression was in some circulation in early 13th-century Denmark and was closely associated with secular elites. The extent of such circulation is hard to know given the limited corpus for the period (above, p. 226), but its popularity can be questioned because far more numerous Old Norse–Icelandic texts do not feature ON *heiðverðr*. One cannot rule out it was a particular Danish linguisitc fossil from a much earlier time. The expression's pronounced connexion with the concept of honour, frankly, yields few additional clues. As has already been pointed out above (nn. 586, 1639), medieval "honour" is a gloriously elastic concept that can accommodate both notions illustrious ancestry and office-holding (as well as ethos

1959 Modern IC. *heiðursverður* and *heiðvirður* seem to be later, (early) modern formations from the same basic elements. The Corpus of Written Icelandic of the University of Iceland Dictionary (IC. *Ritmálssafn Orðabókar Háskólans*), which contains entries for some 700 thousand words since 1540, records the former's first appearance in print only in 1651, and the latter's as late as in 1830: ROH (*s.vv.* "heiðursverður" and "heiðvirður" [accessed 4 March 2024]).

1960 *Placuit igitur execerci<tu regem comi>tatum, uel decet eodem honore potiri, fidelitatem, quam exigit, suis hominibus præstare, uultus hylaritatem exhibere affabilitatisque gratiam <nemini> negare* (Latin text after Kroman 1971, pp. 13–14; translation after Christiansen 1992, p. 36; comments on Sven's biography and source criticism of the *Vederlov* were also consulted from the same edition).

1961 *Thet kunung och andre hætwarthæ men. ther hird skulde hafwa…* (text after Kroman 1971, p. 2).

1962 *…rapær man uskilt hepuarpe man innæn annæns manz ehn, bøtæ þre mark ællær dyli mæþ tyltær eþ* (*SkL* §112, p. 83).

1963 *…diues et prepotens* […] *cui non esset tutum resistere aut propter generis claritatem aut officii dignitalem, qualem* hetwarthreman *in lingua patria nominamus* (Tamm 2018, pp. 78–79).

pertinent to both). Andreas's comment highlights this duality exceptionally well. If for the sake of the argument no change in use and semantics since the raising of the Glavendrup stone is allowed, one could conclude that Alli could have been one such influential Funian 'local boss' (on a par with later Icelandic *goðar*?), as Eric Christiansen once labelled *thegns* on a similar occasion.[1964]

Figure 9. Glavendrup stone (faces A and C). Photo by the author

1964 Christiansen 2002, p. 335.

Figure 10. Glavendrup stone (faces B and C). Photo by the author

Figure 11. Glavendrup stone, gap between **a** and **h** at face A (various lightings). Photo by the author

Figure 12. Glavendrup stone, damaged spot at face B (lines 1–2). Photo by the author

Chapter 5
Conclusions and Reflections

The Viking-Age North Sea chronotope was tightly knit together, and this fact has been long- and well-recognised by historians from political and religious perspectives. Svend Aakjær's 1927 article on Scandinavian *thegns* identified 43 (since then updated to 45) runic inscriptions commemorating them. It therewith brought to light a most curious case to test this interconnectedness in the social sphere as well, because *thegns* are also well-known in Anglo-Saxon England. A problem since Karl Martin Nielsen's 1945 polemical response has been the applicability of the contemporaneous but geographically separated Anglo-Saxon "reference model" to this runic material, if situated in the context of Scandinavian political consolidation late in this period. The historiographical and source-critical survey in Chapter 2 demonstrated that this "model" could benefit from refinement for its own sake, as would the by now stymied discussion between Aakjær and Nielsens' supporters. The potential of revisiting the said "model" and discussion and *thegns* as an object of study, equally relevant to both Anglo-Saxon and Viking-Age studies, was formulated in three novel and hierarchical research Questions. To answer them, this study devised a controlled three-stage methodology. Help was sought, among other tools, in previously unavailable computer technology and digitised Old English and Old Norse language corpora. The empirical Chapters 3–4 proceeded to answer the lexicographic-philological research Question 1 on the potential the semantics of OE/ON *þegn* offered for a better understanding of the social frameworks in the two regions, and the socio-historical research Question 2 on the nature of such frameworks. The final chapter below will now summarise the resultant conclusions in two sub-chapters, one per research Question. In accordance with the study design presented in Chapter 1, the third and last sub-chapter will accordingly address research Question 3 on the late Viking-Age interconnectedness of the North Sea, in relation to the *thegns* in particular.

5.1 Reflection of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian Social Structures in OE/ON *Þegn* and its Diachronic Lexicography

5.1.1 Old English

The semasiological analysis of OE *þegn*'s entries in the digitised DOE Web Corpus reveals that this lexeme's core semantics always had to do with (neutral or respectable) service of a subordinate to a superior. Because of the elevated nature of service performed by someone referred to with OE *þegn*, ever since the earliest available Old English records the word was regularly used in monarchocentric discourses of a royal Mitteisian *comitatus* to designate its junior members. Importantly, though, this always happened in conjunction with genitival qualifiers, such as possessive pronouns or *genetivus possessivus* of attendant nouns.

In contrast to modern scholarly use, in and of itself, and ever more so when without them, OE *þegn* did not command enough semantic potential to connote any discrete social category. But by King Æthelred's reign, it nevertheless occasionally started to. The least controversial explanation is the achieved expansion of the referent group in the said roy-

alist discourse. Before everybody else, the group had normally definitionally comprised the elite around a monarch. But as it widened with the exponential growth of the West Saxon kingdom in the first half of the 10th century, many in the intended audience no longer stood in an immediate *Königsnähe*. In spite of this discrepancy, the Cerdicing kings seem to have carried on their language of top-down personal lordship, which among its lexical elements included OE *þegn*.

This process of naturalisation of this language – induced by royal diplomas, legislation, and correspondence with localities – may have had already been developing during the decades that are presently less densely packed with Old English record. They were not, however, wholly devoid of vernacular documentation. The observed semantic effects thus co-occurred with the deeper penetration of the Cerdicings' governance into the social fabric and on which the royal *lex scripta* was now leaving a stronger imprint. From 962 AD, Bishop Oswald's secretariat began imitating royal titles to land, emphatically calling some of the pontiff's tenants his *thegns*. Within a few years, King Edgar explicitly enjoined his Northumbrian, Mercian, and East Anglian ealdormen to distribute the 'many copies' of the *Wihtbordesstan* edict they received 'so that this measure shall be known both to rich and poor'.[1965] King Æthelred's reign features the first, if problematic, copies of royal writs, as well as overt statements that the king dispatched his "writ (and/or seal)" (above, n. 410) with commands to his undisclosed (local) *thegns* (also referred to by other synonyms for "elite" in the same texts; above, n. 1175). OE *þegn*'s semantical progression from an aristocratic servant of a king to Ann Williams's 'everyone who mattered' – a highborn, landed proprietor, aristocrat, and local "honorary freeman" – by and of itself is therefore tempting to treat as a dialectical shift from quantity to quality. This shift coincided with and is elucidated by the general surge in post-Alfredian Old English literary production.

It may be worthwhile to incorporate these finding into a broader discussion about historical semantics and causality in a society. Notably, OE *þegn*'s pre-existing suffixed derivatives – OE *þegenlīce* and *þegnscipe* – despite previously stable meanings and paralleled by Old Saxon cognates, nonetheless started to denote social qualities and attributes expected in real life. This case seems to fit the German sociologist and philosopher Niklas Luhmann's (1927–1998) theoretical framework that semantics reacts to or mirrors social reality.[1966] Suggesting the opposite (i.e. a changed semantics of OE *þegn* putatively changed the social structure) would require seeking new explanations for the evident semantical shifts themselves, especially within a pronounced conservatism of OE *þegn* in the monarchocentric *comitatus* discourse.

The diachronic trajectory outlined above has an important bearing on Question 1. The ideological component in the Cerdicings' rulership lies beyond the scope of this study. But it cannot go ignored that OE *þegn* found just as much use in religious contexts of divine service hinging upon submission, selflessness, asymmetry, and faith in the superior's good will. Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham probably spoke for many among the late Anglo-Saxon intellectual elite, given the popularity of his writings among the *literati*. It is worth restating that he freely alternated between "God/Christ's slaves" and "God/Christ's *thegns*" in his descriptions of the saints. Further, Ælfric drew most telling parallels between the divine and worldly orders: ignoring Christian teaching *ex cathedra* was the same as ignoring a king's

1965 …*þæt ðes ræd cuð sy ægðer ge earmum ge eadigum* (IV Eg 15:1, p. 214).
1966 For Luhmann's relevant theoretical legacy, see, e.g., Andersen 2013 and other chapters in the same volume.

writ,[1967] but a good Christian may be selected as God's *thegn* to intercede for humanity, carry out His will, and co-rule in Heaven similarly to how an earthly king is served by many *thegns* as befits his kingship.[1968] Regardless of the Cerdicings' potentially conscious contribution to this theology, it sure must have been welcome. They evidently sought to present an inferior's advanced social chances as a consequence of their obedience to the royal dictates, solidified by taking solemn oaths, and rewarded with royal "friendship". Manipulating it and penalising unwanted behaviour as "disobedience" with both legal and extrajudicial means found good use among the Cerdicings' governmental *instruments de travail*.

The circulation of OE *þegn* in application to Anglo-Saxon elites during the "second Viking Age" thus probably highlights their acceptance of the top-down attitude in which kings engaged them, leastwise in higher and formalised socio-linguistics registers. This mode of engagement, despite all achieved institutionalisation of kingship and routinisation of the king's charisma, remained dressed in the mantle of personal lordship. Just as "crime" was conceptually a notional offence against the king,[1969] so too socio-political entitlement and property rights of 'everyone who mattered' were secured by accepting the conceptual framework of a Mitteisian *comitatus*. Its successful utilisation by King Edward the Confessor in his confrontation with Earl Godwine in 1051 AD, described by a chronicler as *thegns* deserting their liege lord – the earl, – for their royal lord (OE *cynehlāford*), should stand as proof to the cumulative weight of *verbum regis*. Finally, because it almost certainly had to do with their obligations arising from encumbered landed proprietorship, this annal also illustrates the progress (hardly complete, though) of transforming royal power over people into power over land.

5.1.2 Old Norse

To semasiologically study ON *þegn* to a full extent is hindered by the lack of a consolidated corpus, so throughout the current research ONP, Menota, IcePaHC, *Fornritin*, and *SkP* were used. What the analysis of the aggregated excerpts has revealed so far is that ON *þegn*'s semantics can be thought of as having a dual core of two autonomous senses. One is "free person", the other is "liegeman–subject to a king". The two are augmented by sundry and poorly distinguishable secondary meanings. The former half of the core connotes such social qualities as entitlement, integrity and manliness, and aristocratism; the latter half rather includes notions of law-abidance, conformity, and loyalty to a political regime headed by a monarch.

A *prima facie* division of the proposed core can be conceived of as aligning with the monarchocentricism of that or another text to feature ON *þegn*. But in truth, both core senses figure in texts indiscriminately. A regularity worth highlighting is the abundance of syndetic and fixed secular use of ON *þegn – bœndr ok búþegnar*, (*at samna/stefna saman*) *þegn ok þrœll*, *þegn*(*gildi*) *ok bœtr*, (*at sverja*) *land/lǫnd ok þegna*, **konungr glezk af þegnum sínum ok þegnar af* **konungi*, approbative/pejorative adj. + (*bú*)*þegn*, *at leggja undir þegnskap sín* – unmatched in Old English. Further philological research will certainly shed more light on the potential implications. But it appears that such idiomatics and frozen syntax[1970] may be indicative of

1967 *SH* II.20, p. 659 (ll. 406–410).
1968 *CH* I.8App, p. 533 (ll. 1–8); *LS* I, *Old English Preface*, chap 4 (ll. 1–15).
1969 Lambert 2012.
1970 With the exception of ON *þegn ok þrœll* that can appear metathetically as *þrœll sem þegn* but only in Old East Norse (attested only in heavily influenced by Norwegian precedent *Västgötalagen*).

a long oral prehistory. Furthermore, this study has not been able to trace any diachronic change in ON *þegn*'s semantics, nor any strong presence in (granted, the far less copiously recorded) Old East Norse and its descendants. Christian and religious meanings can with a degree of certainty be attributed to contacts with Old English. Regardless of the ultimate origin of ON *þegngildi* – as an autochthonous development, an adaptation of OE *þegngield,* or else coined by Old Norse speakers in the "Danelaw" – the legal phenomenon it described with a great degree of certitude entered Scandinavia from England. Together, these considerations may support potential circulation of the attested senses already in the late Viking Age, when, as confirmed by skaldic and runic texts, ON *þegn* surely already circulated.

As per research Question 1, such dialectic semantic duality imbued in ON *þegn*, its social synonymity with ON *bóndi*, and that even in monarch-oriented skaldic verse *thegns* as social actors are the object of kings' discipline (often aggressive) are all probable signs of a heterarchical power distribution among the tiers of the social pyramid above the un- and semi-free. In it, "*thegn*" hardly was a title, as it is not registered in thematic-rhematic constructions syntactically signalling it. These tiers probably correspond to what sources designate with such ON simplices and *lýð*(*i*)*r* and *þjóð* and dupleces like ON *landsfolk*. This social vocabulary and a heterarchichal social layout it describes should probably not be confused for putative tribal primitivity of a clan society. The occasional verbal distinction of "(rich) *thegns*" from a "common populace", complemented by an onomasiological conclusion of ON *þegn*'s applicability to variously termed higher social strata, impresses as suggestive of a socio-politically entitled elite. Its 'diffused' power – to borrow Michael Mann's terminology – and how it is described may further modern reconstruction of the structural sinews that held the (late) Viking-Age society together. Kinship and marriage, beyond doubt, were some of these sinews, with an increasing role higher up the social strata. *Thegns*' familial affiliations, for that matter, span a few generations in the runic commemorations. But the peer recognition, perceived in how *thegns* collectively passed judgements or stood witnesses, in how *thegnship* entailed social respect and integrity, in how "very good *thegns*" became visible in the landscape through commemorative runic monuments, is a probable testimony to how one's personal lordship and lordliness were crucial components of social status. These listed traits also indicate that it included authority probably more than power, as we never get to hear about Scandinavian *thegns* enforcing given orders.

In such a heterarchical social architecture and unlike in England of the same time, a Viking-Age Nordic monarch does not appear as the ultimate dispenser of power, however notional rather than real. Status solicited from a king does not seem always coveted, as can be deduced from the interaction between the *bóndi* Hǫgni Langbjǫrnsson and King Haraldr Sigurðarson. The mode of becoming king's *thegnly* subjects ascribed to the interaction of Kings Óláfr Tryggvasson with the Prœndir in the 990s, Óláfr Haraldsson with the Icelanders and Shetlanders in the 1020s, and Eysteinn Magnússon with the Jamtalanders in the 1130s presupposes cajoling and a mutual, if asymmetrical, benefit. Norwegian royal legislation emphasises the king's obligations to his *thegns* and, for instance, limitations (such as claiming only the delinquent's *þegngildi* in more serious criminal prosecutions). Conversely, King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's heavy-handed realisation of his supposed promise to make all Norwegians his *thegns* led to his tyrannical posthumous reputation among the Icelanders. In the absence of observable diachronic evolution and coupled with the rarity of ON *þegn* in the sense of a "subject of a king" in skaldic poetry, it is also these four cases that can

substantiate one hypothetical lexical-conceptual transition. In parallel with a Frankish precedent, apparently, senses conditioned by kingship in ON *þegn* originated in a notion of personal lordship – as in the legend of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's staged mediated homage to King Æthelstan. So long as it manifested itself in tributary obligations, as is hinted at in *Fagrskinna* and *Landnámabók*'s accounts of the essence of Haraldr's conquest of Norway,[1971] it seems to have also affected all those who acknowledged the authority of the individual(s) who have personally submitted. *Landslov*'s insistence that the representatives' oath was binding to all from corresponding localities whom they represented formalised this principle, already visible in *Sverris Saga*. In this manner, it possibly contributed to the notion of a depersonalised royal domination over the whole free population, which is very much perceptible in *Konungs Skuggsjá* and *Landslov*. One might imagine that before then and the availability of some developped apparatus, kings' power stretched over people before it stretched over land and came down to some co-optation of the upper strata of the free and their lordship.

Finally, the 45 *thegnly* runic inscriptions are suggestive of a high level of supraregional elite communication network. Frode Iversen notes that,

> [...] geo-bound identity is also formed through human meetings at the *thing*, in particular among an upper and a mid-stratum of landowners meeting regularly, while upper elite identity also was rooted in supra-regional mobility and a wider economic and political network. [italics in the original][1972]

Judith Jesch, in turn, draws attention to just how widespread skaldic poetry was, reaching many corners of the Norse-speaking world and being recited at courts of more than just Norwegian rulers, whereas the runic commemorative custom used to for some reasons be more geographically restricted to mainland Scandinavia.[1973] While ON *þegn* certainly had made an appearance before, the frequency of its use – especially in social contexts of kings' interactions with the ruled – waxed during the heyday of this poetic art in the late 10th and 11th centuries. With the probable exception of the Gunderup and Glavendrup stones in Denmark, this is also the time when "very-good-*thegn*" stones were being raised. It stands to reason that such chronological and contextual overlap in the social use of ON *þegn* highlights a continuous and supraregional intellectual milieu and an elite perceptive of (new?) ideas and attendant lexis.

5.2 *Thegns* in the Socio-Political Orders of their Time

5.2.1 Late Anglo-Saxon England

Even if the answers to research QUESTION 2 are not elucidated through Archbishop Wulfstan's interpretative matrix, Anglo-Saxon *thegns* would certainly fit the modern definition of an elite. They meet all the practical points typically proposed for the Middle Ages:

1971 Other mentions of a promised "(everlasting) tax" (ON [*æfinligr*] *skattr*) or "tax payments" (ON *skattgjǫf*) as consequence of becoming king's *thegns* include *Íslendinga Saga*, chap 475, p. 270; *HákHák*, II, chap 374, p. 223; *Gizurársáttmáli*, 460–461; *Morkinskinna*, II, chap 71, pp. 101–102; *HáGóHkr*, chap 12, p. 165, – *cf.* the Icelanders' refusal to pay *skattgjǫf*, consistent of *þegngildi* and poll-tax, in exchange for royal "friendship" (*ÓlHlHkr*, chap 136, p. 241).

1972 Iversen 2020, p. 251.

1973 Jesch 2015, pp. 169–177.

high social status, social recognition reinforced through various outward markers, certain internal hierarchy, and mediators' functions.

Anglo-Saxon *thegns*' social domination went hand-in-hand with their economic resources stemming from controlling the most privileged land tenures on the spectrum of landed proprietorship forms, aptly termed 'lordship of the highest order' by David Roffe.[1974] As landlords, *thegns* were considered accountable for subordinate tenants and other free people, and this lordship was readily used by the Cerdicings to police the rank-and-file. But the same royal laws also contain numerous hints that it entailed not just authority but also power, as it was underpinned by the *thegns*' recognised legal entitlement to sanction offenders. Besides that, kings put the legal weight behind the *thegns*' administrative capacities outside their immediate territorial lordships, such as witnessing transactions, serving justice, providing respite, upholding faith, and enforcing the king's public order.

Aside from Wulfstan's *Compilation on Status*, only post-1066 Anglo-Norman Latin compendia supply unequivocal statements that a *thegn*'s status was also a legal rank defined by a 1,200-shilling *wergild*. The *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge* further complicates the picture by assigning *thegnly* guild members an eight-pound *wergild*[1975] – a specifically "Danelaw" fine[1976] that in this text exists alongside a 1,200-shilling *wergild* not assigned to any specific category. Nor do non-Wulfstanian texts set a threshold to a *thegn*'s legal status at (three-generation long) ownership of five *hides* of land. Nonetheless, in martialised societies, the frontline of combatants commonly consists of people of aristocratic bearing who in times of peace live off landed proprietorship. It may therefore be true that wherever a five-*hide* grid underlay military quotas, (some) contemporaries (but not Domesday commissioners/informants in Circuits 1 and 2, where such quotas are recorded) called those who reported for military service *thegns* exactly because they did so. A *thegnly* legal rank existed more in the form of various death-duty payments in kind/money and judicial fines in favour of the king, which can be seen as a liability rather than privilege in the eyes of the law. Accordingly, this study proposes caution in uniformly identifying people expressly called *thegns* in original sources as the legally ennobled possessors of a 1,200-shilling *wergild*, and *vice versa*. If the presumption regarding the social groups on the Anglo–Scandinavian border (above, p. 189) is correct, this legal rank could have been called *thegns* first and foremost in the "Danelaw". And this fact, in turn, could owe to varying from West Saxon conditions.

In their capacities as local elites, late Anglo-Saxon *thegns* definitively acted as a self-aware social group perceptive to the communality of its members due to their participation in the same social networks. In these roles, they were effectively bodies politic of the predominantly provincial levels, well-captured in a rare original OE compound *scīrþegnas*. Rather than "nobility" in the terminological sense, *thegns* thus better meet the criteria of a "status group": one made of entitled (hereditary) landlords with individualised power over dependents and collective authority to represent the aggregated and legally binding communal will, as well as charged (or rewarded) with certain legal functions and exclusive obligations.

The final conclusions regarding the ontological essence of this status group should be approached in an interlaced manner. The prestige commanded by the language of

1974 Roffe 2007, p. 153.

1975 *And gyf hwa gyldan ofstlea. ne si nan oþer butun eahta pund to bote* ('And if anyone kill a guild-brother, nothing other than eight pounds is to be accepted as compensation'; Cambridge Guild Regulation, p. 611).

1976 Stattel 2019, pp. 171–180.

royal discourse, that which called the elites "*thegns*", encouraged imitation and mimesis. Testimonies are visible in Bishop Oswald's documents, the *Regulation of the* Thegns' *Guild in Cambridge*, *De Obsessione Dunelmi*, and possibly in unrecorded oral use, if Archbishop Wulfstan's *Compilation on Status* aimed at some lining up of social irregularities. But this study has not been able to demonstrate a strong internalisation of a *thegnly* social identity as one's master status on an individual's level. Multiple sources, as different as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and royal writs, treat *thegns* as collectives or implying belonging to a social category when grammatically using OE singular *þegn*. This research assigns the leading (perhaps, conscious) role of creating this collective social identity to the Cerdicings' regime. This research proposes to see it as a dual process of encumbering all aristocratic landed properties on a traditional bookland template and the expansion of notionally personal royal lordship on their holders. The former may have begun already by King Alfred's reign, whereby all who held such properties were to be considered king's men;[1977] the latter is securely attested during his son's campaign in "Danish Mercia" and East Anglia, in which local elites submitted to him personally and their lands to a West Saxon–"English Mercian" royal prerogative. The prosopography of witness lists in diplomas suggests that the extended circle in which the Cerdicing kings socialised as sovereigns – and on whose immediate service they relied – did not qualitatively change. At the levels below the select few great magnates, it still generally consisted of local notables, drafted predominately from south of the Thames (probably the West Saxon "median *thegns*" from the *heriot* schedule) where the kings spent most of their reigns. Tenurial obligations as a constituent of elite status thus progressively substituted direct *Königsnähe* the farther away one resided from this core territory. With the conceptual conclusions in §5.1.1, royal power seems to have had more to gain from such co-optation. To a Cerdicing, a remote and personally unknown aristocrat was his *thegn* and addressed as such in royal correspondence, inasmuch as his landed property bore liabilities brought from "Greater" Wessex (OE *bōcriht*) and he could count on royal "friendship" in exchange for pursuing the king's commands. To a remote aristocrat who never entered the king's presence or personally benefited from royal grace, he was a (king's) *thegn* as much as he performed military, legal, fiscal, and administrative duties overseen by a royal administrator (ealdorman and/or reeve) and reported to him on law infringements. More than a discrete social ontology – an internalised identity (to the level of master status) in a concrete social category/group – Anglo-Saxon *thegnship* probably meant an external identification and ascribed status for particular societal roles and scenarios. This is, apparently, precisely what the Herefordshire matron from S 1462 had in mind when she exhorted the judges to act *thegnly*.

Accordingly, the geographical aspect therefore bifurcates too. Even with the skewed corpus of royal diplomas, at least before the Danish conquest in the 1010s, ranks of kings' *thegns* proper thinned out proportionally with the distance from the West Saxon core. Ranks of *thegns* in the extended sense of an ascribed status, before other factors, depend

1977 This research does not concern itself with the Anglo-Saxon martial principles as an object of study. Yet it is tempting to entertain the explanation (or part of it) that such spread had (at least in a certain degree) to do with King Alfred's reorganisation of his military. Both Asser and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* drop a hint that the king introduced rotational shifts as the basis of staffing both his household and army (*VÆR*, chap 100, pp. 86–87; *ASC*: 893 AD [MSS A, C, D]). This most likely led to the intensification of interactions between the elite and the court and further subjection of the landed proprietors to royal demands of military service.

on the estimated level of homogenisation of social and administrative structures across the English kingdom. Assuming at least superficial levelling (itself in need of a methodological grounding) but allowing for remaining internal variation, these ranks could be knowable only from *Domesday Book*, because contemporaneous records from outside "Greater" Wessex are slight in comparison to those from inside. But the people behind *Domesday Book* were concerned with matters other than research Question 2 and varied their language of description. From a semasiological the task becomes onomasiological (*cf.* §4.4.3.2), and thus a study of *thegns* as a status group in a proper, extended, or internalised sense, turns into a study of the social category of late Anglo-Saxon landed elites.

As demonstrated in §2.2, this is what *thegns* are often identified as being. In truth, many quite likely were, which salvages a lot in the Wulfstanesque "reference model", provided it is treated as impressionistically descriptive rather than legally normative. It is just as possible that wherever people could claim a 1,200-shilling *wergild*, some of them were (called) *thegns* in at least one of the proposed senses, especially in the "Danelaw". It is equally conceivable that many of them owned five *hides* of land or more. But in recognition of the source criticism and of the link between *thegns* and the Cerdicing governance and ideology, this study suggests that to avoid conflation of original vocabulary and modern analytical apparatus, that which we call a "*thegn*" by any other name would be investigable as aptly.

5.2.2 Scandinavia during the "Second Viking Age"

The situation is similar in contemporaneous Scandinavia, served by synchronous skaldic verse, runic inscriptions, and post-dating vernacular accounts. Only *Brennu-Njáls Saga* once puts in the mouth of its character a *thegnly* self-identification, and so once does *Gísls Páttr Illugasonar*. There remain reasons to think that it mirrored a specific juridical role in the former and a legal protection arising from political conditions in the latter, not a master status. Otherwise, individual or collective *thegnly* status appears externally ascribed to various people in various situations. Even the 47[1978] commemorated on rune stones were labelled "very good *thegns*" by familial sponsors who outlived them. But neither were children ever commemorated as children of *thegns*, nor were women identified as *thegns*' wives in runic inscriptions or later prose texts. It is justified to conclude then that, contrary to the common modern assumption, "*thegn*" was not a title, but rather a personal and non-heritable social characteristic.

Just as in England, though, where *thegns* are occasionally mentioned together with bookland, their Scandinavian counterparts, too, appear connected with a peculiar type of landed proprietorship: the odal. In pursuit of answers to research Question 2, as for England, a strictly controlled methodology was used to elucidate the corresponding social category verbally associated with odal: the *hǫldar*. Such an onomasiologically-inspired step appears also semasiologically warranted, because the poetic *Rígsþula* and *Manna Heiti*, as well as Snorri Sturluson's prose commentary and one of Markús Skeggjason's poems, do treat them as synonyms (at least for poetic contexts). It suggests that in the semiotic triangle, ON *þegnar* and *hǫldar* could be lexical symbols for one and the same social referent connected through the concept of odal landed property. Links both ways become stronger with consideration of how odal is notionally affiliated with burial mounds as a sort of title to

1978 The number of individuals higher than that of actual stones owes to pairs being commemorated in Sö 34 and Sö 367.

land. Not only can later sources connect them with the *hǫldr*-born and ON *ríkismenn* – another likely synonym for the same category, sometimes collectively called ON *hǫfðingjar* and also sometimes contextually presupposing *thegns*, – but the *thegn* and his wife commemorated on the Gunderup stone are said to be buried in a mound. Finally, ON *hǫldr*'s permissible contextual synonymity with ON *bóndi* (as in the thematic-rhematic function of occupational status not solicited from king and as in *Borgarþingsløg* and *Eiðsivaþingsløg*) and the latter's hyponymic synonymity with ON *þegn* corroborates this equation.

Upon examination, this variously-named social category appears to have been the hereditary and heterogenous dominant stratum of the Viking-Age society (though best known from Norwegian sources) who dominated precisely thanks to controlling ancestral immovable property and enjoying some authority over people dwelling on those lands. It follows, chiefly from lexical evidence and association with odal, that the Ynglingar–Hárfagri kings with various success applied efforts to convert their junior partners into notional clients and liegemen, which later (arguably partisan) authors conceptualised as encroachment on inherent liberties confluent with property rights. In practice, the encroachment probably entailed extraction of some obligatory renders that later authors conceptualised as "tax" or "rent" – precisely because, if Ásgrímr Úlfsson's sentiment can be trusted, they were no longer given as honourable "gifts" but expected in a top-down manner. Upon refusal or armed resistance, in sagas and synoptic histories' exposition often quelled, property rights were aggressively denied. Upon co-optation, accordingly, they could be enhanced but also conditioned which could be perceived by some as (a kind of) servitude.

The details of these dramatic interactions are known only about the upper strata, with whom kings socialised the most. But as suggested in §5.1.2, chances are that personal status of a king's *thegn* spread further down onto those whom he represented. This is probably why, for example, *bændr* (*ok búþegnar*) are on some occasions included into the "common people", but not on others. As ruminated in §§4.5.1 and 4.5.3, this crust atop a broader (*hǫldar–*)*bændr–thegnly* social category differed from it quantitatively rather than qualitatively, but the inclusivity and scope of these strata are still hard to gauge, though. Future semasiological research in Old Norse socio-legal terminology will probably advance the question of *thegnly* inclusivity.

Yet again, their numbers, as in England, probably fluctuated depending on the eye of the beholder and, of course, period. Thus, the *thegnly* legal identity appears to be more inclusive and conditioned firstly by some minimal property criteria to ensure legal accountability. And as in England, the matter of geographical spread of Scandinavian *thegns* comes down less to the matter of the presence of a given status group, but rather of communality of their identification as *thegns*. Since ON *þegn* as a social synonym for *bóndi* finds many attestations in skaldic poetry in its heyday, the most intriguing question is the pronounced clustering of "(very-)good-*thegn*" stones only in Northern Jutland and Västergötland (plus, probably, Southern Skåne with its four stones). §4.5.3 discourages the explanation that they commemorated people in the Jelling dynasty's immediate employ. The objection to "camp vassalage" becomes especially emphasised given its (false-positive, as argued in §2.3.2.1) attempt to correlate it with *drengly* rune stones, also distributed where no *thegns* are mentioned. Given the extreme uniformity of the *thegnly* inscriptions, it is at present easiest to explain their clustering as some local fashion or tradition that may have to do with, for example, socio-cultural networking or mimesis – something briefly discussed already

by Karl Martin Nielsen and then picked up by Martin Syrett.[1979] As proposed by Marco Bianchi, the Södermanlandic "*þróttar-þegn*" cluster probably arose in a similar emulation of the prestigious language of power to the south and west.

With that, the "Aakjær–Nielsen" problem of the social identity of runic *thegns* may have reached a tentative resolution. The question thus may be reformulated from "who were the Scandinavian *thegns*?" to "why was a particular status group called *thegns* only in so many places?" The preliminary answers bring us to the next and final part in this study and answer to research Question 3.

5.3 "All the *Thegns* […] Both English and Danish"?[1980]

The study has demonstrated the existence of a semantically entangled dual core of ON *þegn*. But it has not directly addressed the relation between its constituents other than hypothesising on the transition to the sense of "king's subject". In isolation, both seem to be quite self-sufficient and not conceptually linked. One could, for example, assume that the Ynglingar–Hárfagri sought to (forcefully) make all Norwegians *thegns* their *thegns* and met resistance along the way. This would assign primacy to one of the core meanings and explain further developments. But texts disprove such an assumption. Neither do they support the assumption of a similar to the Old English semantic widening to the sense "social elite" from "all members of elite are royal liegemen" (unless it had happened before extant records begin). On the Old English (and other Germanic languages, for that matter: see Excursus 1) analogy, one would expect to find good numbers of ON *þegn*'s independent senses associated with generically neutral service. In practice, they are either absent or are under Old English influence. Even whenever ON *þegn* denotes a "royal liegeman", it is by far not the first and most common lexical device to convey this idea. Rather, it becomes conveyed by, for instance, ON *lendr maðr* or *handgenginn maðr*, which also presupposes a far more interpersonal level of relationship.

These incongruences may be rationalised by allowing for the appearance of *both* discussed core senses in Old Norse in an *already* finished and diverged pre-existing forms. It could explain the postulated irreducibility of attested meanings to a monolithic semantic core and occasional preference to leave the word agnonymically untranslated in modern editions. Because both senses are well-explained and traceable in Old English, influence from west across the North Sea seems the most natural null hypothesis.

ON *þegn* bears signs of a consistent North Germanic linguistic phenomenon of breaking of the stressed short root vowel /e/ into /ja/, first attested in the runic imperative verbal form **hialp** (ᚼᛁᚨᛚᛒ) (< PGMC **helpan-*)[1981] already in the former half of the 8th century in the cranium inscription from Ribe.[1982] The vowel breaking in ON *þegn* matches predictions by linguistic theory: it is more common, if still scarce, in Old East Norse and is borne out by some runic inscriptions that spell **þiakn** and at least twice in Old Swedish manuscripts'

1979 Nielsen 1945, p. 120; Syrett 1998, pp. 255–257.

1980 An abbreviation from S 1394 and S 1406: ⁊ *ealle þa þegenas on Wigraceastrescire . ge englisce ge denisce* and ⁊ *ealle þa þegnas on Wigeraceastrescire . denisce* ⁊ *englisce*, accordingly (a Worcester chancellery stock phrase?).

1981 Kroonen 2013, p. 219 (*s.v.* "*helpan-").

1982 DR EM85;151B, recently re-examined by Nordström 2021, pp. 5–24. On breaking in Ancient and Old Norse, see Bandle et al. 2002, chap IX:81, pp. 709–711.

þjægn[1983] (conversely, Old West Norse manuscripts never feature the broken form). Unless the *-ia-* spelling in ON *þegn* represents one of the runic ways of rendering the monophthong /æ/,[1984]and unless in Old Swedish it reflected a breaking by analogy, the broken /e/ must be a sign of the word's aboriginal presence in Old Norse.[1985] Yet, even in the latter case, a borrowing did not need to have proceeded as a *word* transplantation. Knowing that miscellaneous and Christian meanings and some expressions are unquestionably easiest to explain as borrowings from Old English, social senses could have been a *semantic* cross-pollination by a cognate Old English form too. It was feasibly superimposed on a pre-existing native lexeme, which could have been dormant or obsolete until then, if the revisited etymology, that surprisingly shows no native reflexes in Old Norse, holds after all. There may be arguments on both coasts of the North Sea to corroborate such a supposition.

5.3.1 Probable Old Norse Legalisms in Old English Texts

I have previously argued elsewhere[1986] that by focusing on the "reference model" and/or a monarchocentric historiographic descriptions of Anglo-Saxon *thegns*, the controversy over runic *thegns* seems to have overlooked that in the "Danelaw" OE *þegn* saw synchronous use in non-monarchocentric senses and social situations unmistakably recorded in Old Norse too.

The lexical parallelism appears in, for instance, alterations between OE *þegn* and *mann*, that is otherwise characteristic not of Old English but rather of Old Norse. The dual Woodstock–Wantage legislation envisaged situations when a lord would invite two "trustworthy/good *thegns*" to support his oath about a good reputation of a man in his lordship,[1987] or five to support a cleansing oath that he never abetted a wrongdoer in his lordship or from his household to flee.[1988] When Wulfstan reproduced these paragraphs in King Cnut's legislation, in the former case he substituted OE *þegnas* for OE *menn* leaving the rest untouched,[1989] and varied between the two lexemes in the latter case.[1990]

1983 …*þral sum þiængn* ("...both *thrall* and *thegn*"; *ÄVgL*, Mandråpsbalken, §13:1, p. 36); …*ligge i þiængs gældom. þæt ær .xl. markær* ("...it [= murder] is to be compensated with a *þegngildi*, that is forty marks"; *VmL*, Manhelgdsbalken §11, p. 146). The *iæ*-spelling is consistent with the progressive *i*-umlaut in the /ja/ diphthong in Old Swedish, attested already in some 11th-century runic inscriptions (Bandle et al. 2002, chap XI:102, p. 898).

1984 As it is interpreted by Nordström in **tuiarki** (ᛏᚢᛁᛅᚱᚴᛁ) (normalised *dværgi*) from the same Ribe cranium inscription. The previous reading would rather suggest **uiarki** (normalised *verki*), with little effect on the point about spelling the root /e/ or /æ/.

1985 Gunn 2017, p. 130, indicates that breaking by analogy could have occurred in ON *bjalla* (? ≺ OE *belle* or a Middle Low German cognate), first attested in 1032 AD, though it is only one of the possibilities. Another case of /e/ > /ja/ breaking affecting loanwords seems to be ON *bjannak*: an apparent *hapax legomenon* in *Heimskringla* (*ÝngHkr*, chap 2, p. 11; see comments in the same edition) that is thought to be an adaptation of Middle Irish Gaelic *bennacht* (modern Irish *beannachd*: MacBain 1911, p. 32 [*s.v.* "beannachd"]), ultimately derived from LAT. *benedictio* (lit. blessing). Also to consider as indicators of borrowing may be spellings *thæghæn* (*ÞjsL*, Anden bog §13, p. 162) and *thæyghna* (*HIL*, l. 3300), suggestive of a progressively palatalised /g/ affecting the root vowel quality – *cf.* late(r) OE form *þegen* /θejen/, with the second epenthetic /e/ before a syllabified final /n/ and following a consonant, plus the regular velar fricative undergoing palatalisation after a front vowel (Campbell 1983, pp. 174, 226). Checking for similar phonological transformations of the /-egn-/ clusters in native Norse words will certainly shed more light.

1986 Sukhino-Khomenko 2020b.

1987 I Atr 1:2, p. 216, and III Atr 4, p. 228. The former paragraph speaks of *twegen getreowe þegenas* ('two trustworthy thegns') within a hundred, the latter of *twam godum þegenum* ('two good thegns').

1988 I Atr 1: 8, 12, p. 218.

1989 …*twegen getrywe men* (II Cn 30:1, pp. 330–332).

1990 *Cf.*: …*nime him fif getreowe men tó ⁊ beo him sylf sixta ⁊ ladige hine ðæs* ('...he shall choose five trustworthy men, and shall himself make a sixth, and shall clear himself of the accusation') and …*ladige hine mid fif ðegnum ⁊*

Another vivid example is the appearance of a twelve-elder-*thegn* tribunal panel in the Wantage law-code aimed at Northern "Danish Mercia" in the late 990s. This arrangement is reminiscent of the twelve-*thegn skiladómr* in odal-related cases in *Gulaþingslǫg* and of the *tolfmannadómr* in *Grágás*. It is immaterial for the present discussion whether or not the Wantage code (rather than the Clarendon Assize of 1166 AD) is the birth certificate of the trial by jury in England. It is instead important rather that while Anglo-Saxon panels of twelve or their multiples in various legal capacities,[1991] as well as various expressions on the "elder-people" model, had appeared before (above, §3.3.11.2). But it was the "Danelaw" Wantage law-code that first brought them together. Noticeable also is the appearance of pairs of *thegns* as legal actors. This first occurs (in almost identical formulations) in the Wantage–Woodstock dual legislation just discussed, and then in *Northumbrian Priests' Laws* as co-collectors of "Peter's pence", probably as a secular "muscle" to complement the priest's clerical authority. Pairs are infrequent in the preserved Anglo-Saxon law, and at any rate, they do not make up a fixed legal praxis or tradition.[1992] Contrarily, as noted in §4.4.1, pairs "pledging their *thegnship*" are a regular feature of the Icelandic *Grágás*. In both Wantage–Woodstock cases just mentioned, *thegns* were to be "trustworthy" or "good". "Good *thegns*" occur elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon texts, but it is only in Norse-associated contexts of the Wantage code and *Northumbrian Priests' Laws* that "trustworthy *thegns*" become synonymous with "trustworthy men" as witnesses or compurgators that had occurred before. It can be argued that the Woodstock legislation, aimed at the English part of the kingdom, features them as well. But it also features a five-*thegn* group of compurgators[1993] – something seemingly alien to the extant Anglo-Saxon legislation[1994] but very common in Norwegian and Icelandic laws that regularly feature a six-man oath.[1995] The five-*thegn* group may have been a legal import from the "Danelaw".

Another case of the same may have been *þegngildi*. While it is unclear, who coined the word first, the juridical phenomenon – a forty-mark remuneration to a king for killing anyone in his lordship – has been connected to the presence of large Scandinavian military forces in the 990s and 1010s, to whom their leader appeared a legal substitute of next of kin. Around the same time, Archbishop Wulfstan and his flock were familiar with a fiction of a society as constituted of *thegns* and *thralls*. Whether it was another of his lexical

beo him sylf syxta ('...he shall clear himself with [the help of] five thegns, himself making a sixth'; II Cn 30:7, 31a, p. 334), reproducing I Atr 1:8, 1:12 verbatim, save the discussed swap.

1991 To barely scratch the surface: compurgators: AGu 3, p. 126; II As 11, p. 156; IV As 6:2b, p. 171, II Cn 48, p. 344; sureties: IV Eg 3–6, p. 210; "law men": Duns 1:2, 3:2, pp. 374, 376.

1992 In Ordal 3, p. 386, it is probably an *ad hoc* role: to control the temperature of red-hot iron in the ordeal process; Hl 16, p. 11, and IV Eg 6:2, p. 210, set out one and the same situation when purchases need to be authenticated by two or three witnesses – in the latter stipulation, from a standing twelve-man hundredal body; III Atr 9, p. 230, speaks of 'two trustworthy witnesses' to any cattle slaughter; VIII Atr 19–20, p. 265, requires two ordained witnesses to clear of accusations from a cleric of the same rank (reproduced in in I Cn 5a–1, pp 284–286).

1993 Also recycled in II Cn 30a, 44:1, pp. 332, 342.

1994 A group of five as a legal actor had occured on one occasion in the Anglo-Saxon legal corpus that seems completely unrelated: *Se ðe yrfe befó, nemne him mon v men his neahgebura, ⁊ begite ðara v: i, ðæt him midswerige, þæt he hit on folcryht him toteo* ('He who attaches livestock shall have five men nominated to him from among his neighbours, and he shall select one of the five to swear with him that he is attaching the livestock in accordance with public law'; II As 9, p. 154).

1995 Love et al. 2020, p. 294 (*s.vv.* "séttareiðr" and "sexmannaeiðr"), – it is probably the same as the 'fivefold oath' mentioned in *FrostL*, XV §8, p. 255, that most likely simply did not count the culprit's oath.

inventions, or whether he picked up a previous use to meet his "Danelaw" auidence's *Erfahrungsraum*, it resurfaced on the opposite coast of the North Sea later.

Finally, the idea of universal royal patronage over *thegns* as (initially only) those whom Ann Williams called 'everyone who mattered' may have entered into Old Norse parlance from English, as there can be construed an inherently chronologically consistent explanatory model. The idea was first recorded late in King Æthelred's reign (§3.3.13), but became increasingly popular across the sea. Thus, 'all my thegns, "twelve-hundreders" and "two-hundreders"' in a later 1020 AD writ (S 985) in King Cnut's name seem to later become naturalised as ON *allir* (*sínir*) *þegnar,* (*bæði*) *ríkir sem/ok óríkir fátækir* in attested formulaic use in Norway.[1996]

5.3.2 East Meets West: North Sea Thegnly *Cross-Pollination*

As said, these incidents are best explained as arising from a shared social and linguistic experience over decades of co-existence and mutual cultural exchange. Relating back to the hypothesis that Old Norse inherited ON *þegn* (or its core senses) in a received form, a potential scenario and proposed answer to research QUESTION 3 may, with utmost due caution, be synergised thus:

At the pinnacle of the "first Viking Age", Scandinavians in lowland Britain were introduced to a concept of a *thegn* in the monarchocentric West Saxon discourse that started taking shape under King Alfred, to judge from the *Fonthill Letter*, coupled with his "doom-book" and treaty with Guthrum. Already here, the elite of the Scandinavian diaspora may have been getting used to being designated "*thegns*" due to the brokered *wergild* that had to match their indigenous system. A short while later, the next generation was forced to choose between "exit", "voice", and "loyalty" in the face of the West Saxon expansion. Where previously Danish aristocrats could readily ignore "king's" before "*thegns*", the conditions imposed by Edward the Elder re-actualised this genitival qualifier. Those who, for all that they knew, had been *thegns* thanks to their elevated social standing, now also became king's *thegns* thanks to burdens of personal – such as *heriot* – and tenurial – such as military service – obligations that underpinned a West Saxon Mitteisian *comitatus*. That being said, the bulk of the "Danelaw" *thegns*, at least before King Cnut's ascension, probably never wholly conformed to the West Saxon template. Most conspicuously *Königsnähe* rarely reached beyond the imaginary Wirral–Thames estuary line en masse, as the Cerdicings only so rarely visited here. Such incongruence may have provoked the bent-on-orderliness Archbishop Wulfstan to give his new audience a description of such a template, dressed as a fictitious native praxis of old and penned after his promotion to the York see. His *Geþyncðu* may signal this corrective zeal of his in its use of a previously unnoticed Old Norse borrowing in this text. Rather than 'riding business among the royal retinue', "riding of a king's ordinance to the court", or 'important errands undertaken by a mounted messenger',[1997] the *hapax legomenon* OE *rādstefn*[1998] in *Geþyncðu* (see clause 3 in APPENDIX 1.1) is better explained as an adaptation of ON *ráð*(*s*)*stefna* (lit. convention, < ON *ráð*, lit. council,

1996 It is to be discussed whether the latter syndetic opposition was another adaptation of Old English royal officialise, such as OE (*ge*) *earme* (*ge*) *ēadige* (above, nn. 720, 1965), a borrowing from another (common?) source, or an independent development. In any case, its presence in the Old Norse ecumene testifies to yet another point of convergence in socio-conceptual frameworks.

1997 Rabin 2020, p. 11; *Gesetze* I, p. 457; Whitelock 1969, p. 468.

1998 Bosworth–Toller (*s.v.* "rādstefn").

+ *stefna*, lit. to/a summon[ing]).[1999] The whole, highly alliterative phrase to feature it – *þegen* [...] *þenode cynge and his ræadstefne rad ón his hirede* – can thus be appropriately interpreted "a *thegn* served the king and rode to [attend] a meeting at/with the royal court".[2000] In essence, Wulfstan must have been educating the entrusted to his care in comprehensible terms that a "true" *thegn* is ultimately a lord attending royal assemblies. This was something even smaller calibre magnates in the West Saxon heartland, blessed with kings' physical proximity (see Map 2, Map 8, and Map 9), could occasionally do. But most of Wulfstan's flock contrarily did not, though to trust *De Obsessione Dunelmi*, some of them still were probably referred to as *thegns* – if not by themselves, then, perhaps, by their environment. So, the clause in question may have been born in the face of various elite *Erfahrungsräume*. Similarly, Wulfstan was apparently confronted by a less exclusive than in Wessex distribution of military gear among the local free demographics. It was also noticeable in Viking-Age Scandinavia[2001] (especially Norway),[2002] where swords, for example, were a more complex than mere aristocratic social markers.[2003] Accordingly, Wulfstan probably sought to teach his congregation in *Norðleoda Laga* (see clause 2 in Appendix 1.2) about weapons' insufficiency for an elevated status. In his "orderly society", such status was necessarily corroborated by landed property, the duration of familial holding of which most certainly was informed by the leasing habits of Wulfstan's predecessors in the Worcester cathedra. Probably less so in the "Danelaw" that, one may think, used to be consistently barren of an immigrant legal nobility as a social category and/or group separate from the rest of the free, to judge from the two pacts with the Cerdicing monarchs. With that, the notion of *thegnship* met one sociolinguistic barrier fewer on its pathway of dissemination among the Norse speakers: any free person not subjected to anyone's asymmetrical claims of liberty, could *ipso facto* be considered a *thegn* as opposed to, for example, a *thrall*. This is probably why some two centuries later Domesday scribes, predominantly in the "Little" Domesday (i.e. covering East Anglia and Essex) haphazardly variated between LAT. *tainus* and *liber homo* (above, n. 1029), as did some later Anglo-Norman writers when translating Old English legal texts.

Returning to the early 900s, Coastal Norway is believed to have been similarly experiencing some consolidatory political process. The historicity of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri and chronology of his legendary, Methuselah-like long reign, as described in 13th-century prose Old Norse accounts, is contentious. Yet that *a* ruler by this name was fighting his way to the top of other Western Norwegian potentates seems to veraciously underlie all these later narratives.[2004] The silence on him by Óttarr from Hálogaland in the 890s (above, p. 23), together with ascribed contacts with King Æthelstan, might potentially indicate a centrepiece of Haraldr's biography speculatively more or less contemporaneously with the Cerdicings' offensives in the "Danelaw". With no native synchronous documentation, the cross-North-Sea political interactions of this time appear in a somewhat garbled way. But some did get woven into the fabric of historical records, if obscurely. Haraldr's son

1999 ONP (*s.v.* "ráð[s]stefna"), also present in modern Icelandic since at least the mid-19th century: ROH (*s.v.* "ráðstefna").

2000 I am most grateful to Auður Magnúsdóttir for discussing this perplexing linguistic incident and lending her expertise.

2001 See some preliminary observations by, e.g., Androushchuk 2009, pp. 93–104, as well as other publications by the same author.

2002 Martens 1994.

2003 Jesch 2015, pp. 97–99.

2004 Latest examined by, e.g., Dørum 2017.

Hákon inn Góði's skaldically attested by-name, Áðalsteinsfóstri (lit. Æthelstan's foster-son), the muffled mentions of an otherwise unknown Norwegian bishop Sigfriðr/Sigfrøðr (LAT. *Sigefridus*) dying a few decades later, together with *Ágrip* and *Heimskringla*'s assertions of Hákon fetching "learned men" from England,[2005] do corroborate such contacts. Beside the, doubtless literary, description in *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, how and when exactly Hákon found himself at King Æthelstan's court we will never know for sure. But some exchange of embassies must have occurred. William of Malmesbury (much later) recalled about King Æthelstan that,

> [a] certain Harold [inn Hárfagri?], king of the Norwegians, sent him a ship with gilded beak and a scarlet sail, the inside of which was hung round with a close-set row of gilded shields. The names of the envoys were Helgrim and Osfrith, and after a royal reception in the city of York they wiped off the sweat of their journey with suitable rewards.[2006]

Æthelstan is known to have visited York in 927 and 934 AD. In the context of William's narrative, the former date as the *terminus* for a meeting with the Norwegian ambassadors is preferable. That year, Æthelstan turned the Northumbrian interregnum to his benefit and seized the vacant throne, and on 12 July, four British princes accepted him as overlord. If there were any truthful core to *Fagrskinna–Heimskringla*'s anecdote about Haraldr becoming Æthelstan's *thegn* by touching his sent sword, perhaps, either Haraldr's gift of honour was intended as a token of distant submission, or it was re-interpreted in such terms and led to a reciprocal act. Either way, if William's account is factually sound and if King Haraldr indeed "had a clear plan",[2007] the Scandinavian political elite was acutely aware of the events in Britain to promptly react and equip a diplomatic mission in the short window of time that Æthelstan spent up north.

Æthelstan's court undoubtedly saw the subordinated local bodies politic as "king's *thegns*", most certainly illustrated by the letter sent to the king by *omnes Cantescyræ thaini* in the 930s. King Hákon inn Góði is credited by some modern biographers to "have had an overall goal: to introduce the English royal model in Norway".[2008] Later historical tradition ascribed Hákon legislative activity and introduction of (semi-)regular military levy, and modern historians since long have preferred to see an Anglo-Saxon precedent behind it. Indeed, the recorded law-code of the Gulathing law-province, supposedly instituted by Hákon and just as supposedly recycled in Iceland where we (on this reading, probably non-coincidentally) later find legal actors "pledging their *thegnship*", contains some very suggestive parallels (repetitions?) of the earlier West Saxon legislation.[2009] In course of pursuing this supposed goal, Æthelstan's foster-son and his followers could have brought with them elements of the West Saxon royalist discourse. If Hákon's address to the Þrœndir *høfðingjar* as *bœndr ok búþegna, ríka ok óríka* was not wholly invented, *þegn* – or its monarchocentric sense – was one of such elements. It may have been already then that the conspicuous Old English formulaic greeting of "all king's *thegns* there-and-there" began penetrating the royal Norwegian

2005 Williams 2011, pp. 114, 116–117. King Hákon's biography as a whole has recently been overviewed by Sigurðsson and Hellerud 2012.

2006 *Haroldus quidam, rex Noricorum, misit ei nauem rostra aurea et uelum purpureum habentem, densa testudine clipeorum inauratorum intrinsecus circumgiratam. Missorum nomina fuere Helgrim et Osfrid, qui, regaliter in urbe Eboraca suscepti, sudorem peregrinationis premiis decentibus extersere* (*GRA*, book II, chap 135:1, pp. 216–217).

2007 '...han hadde en klar plan' (Sigurðsson and Hellerud 2012, p. 145).

2008 'Som konge må han ha hatt et overordnet mål: å innføre den engelske kongemodellen i Norge' (Sigurðsson and Hellerud 2012, p. 146).

2009 Sukhino-Khomenko 2020b, pp. 211–213.

lexicon. King Hákon's contemporary Egill Skallagrímsson, according to the eponymous saga, also found himself at Æthelstan's court. This experience may explain his choice of ON *þegn* to designate Hákon's liegeman Þórsteinn Þóruson. It most certainly fit Egill's *Erfahrungsraum* and possibly that and *Erwartungshorizont* of Þórsteinn, if Hákon regulrarly referred to his subordinates in an Old English manner more than just in formulaic use.

Whether or not the groundwork had been plausibly laid already under King Haraldr inn Hárfagri is ultimately a speculation. But it is nevetherless useful to consider whether his conquest – which became etched into Scandinavian historical memory as deprivations of odal lands (§4.4.2.1) and his legendary promise to make "all Norwegians" his *thegns* – underwent as the Cerdicings' roughly contemporaneous expansion. More conservatively, perhaps, Haraldr's conquest was more *ana*logous rather than *homo*logous to that of the Cerdicings across the North Sea, which, then, may have been why later historians used a vocabulary associated with it. From what sources tell us, before anybody else, his promise must have concerned "all Norwegians" who mattered, such as *hersir*-related Ketill Flatnef, Ásgrímr Úlfsson, and other unknown odal-born. In practice, that they became Haraldr's *thegns* and, perhaps, *sverðtakarar,* probably meant some sort of encumberment of their ancestral landed properties on pain of confiscation. Such conditioning appears very reminiscent of how Edward the Elder's campaigns left

> [...] no land so free in the whole of Huntingdonshire that it could not be lost through forfeiture,[2010]

– and of how king's *thegns* 'among the Danes' with the "sake and soke" rights rendered £4 as *heriot* instead of weapons.

If the identified English connexions are viable, perhaps then, *Heimskringla*'s succinct description of King Haraldr inn Hárfagri's administrative framework (ON *réttr*)[2011] does hold some (muddy) water. His jarls and *hersar* may not have systematically rendered sixty- and twenty-man armed contingents. But military quotas underpinned the bookland type of landed property in contemporaneous England, and the Cerdicings imposed such burdens as they pushed into the "Danelaw". Perhaps, so did Haraldr in respect of odal-holders. This must have naturally caused *heraðshǫldar*, who themselves used to collect dues from clients, to discontent at the sentiment of being stripped of the odal-born status: i.e. no enforced accountability before superiors, guaranteed by unencumbered landed property. Haraldr's jarls and *hersar*'s entitlement to a third of collected revenues on the king's behalf, then, may not have to be so much out of joint either. The institutional genealogy of the conspicuously parallel "earl's third penny" in Anglo-Saxon England is problematic, because it is unclear when it became as systematic as we find it in the 11th century. But already Alfredian ealdormen kept a cut of regal profits from fines for risking an ealdorman's military reserve.[2012] Earlier on the Continent, counts retained a third of the profits from regal prerogative. Stephen Baxter did not discard the probability (later criticised by Tom Lambert) that,

> [...] the concept of the third penny was imported to England from Francia and then re-exported to Scandinavia.[2013]

2010 *LE*, book II, chap 25, p. 99.
2011 *HaHáFgrHkr*, chap 6, p. 98.
2012 Af 37–31:1, p. 70.
2013 Baxter 2007, p. 90.

From the argument from silence and a considerable time gap, the standardisation of such revenues and fixing them at the rate of one third appears more plausible during the later part of 10th century, as per Lambert. But no other source mentions an institutionalised tripartition of royal revenues in Scandinavia. Hence, that East met West (probably at the same "Danelaw" venue), if not as anachronistically regular as Haraldr's *réttr* got reported later, also seems historically more plausible than a putative institutional Scandinavian import when West met the East under King Cnut.[2014]

In Cnut's reign and shortly before, transregional contacts further intensified.[2015] In the intellectual sphere, besides Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical influence in all three countries,[2016] there is also highly cosmopolitan language and ideas in the poetry of the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson.[2017] He is one of the two authorities on the Norwegian *thegns* suffering expropriations of odal in the 1030s. And besides the accommodation of other Old English intellectual items, OE *þegn* potentially among them, he seems to have been familiar with the Old English social views, to judge from his probable adaptation of OE *ge eorle, ge ceorle* in the same poem.[2018] In the sphere of material culture, coin dies, jewellery, pottery, clothes, some raw materials, ecclesiastical masonry of Anglo-Saxon technology circulated in King Cnut's realm.[2019] The number of people that permanently migrated was not, insofar as is known at present, considerable. But quality may have mattered as much as quantity. In 1028 AD, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports, King Cnut took out a fleet of fifty English ships for his offensive campaign in Norway; and manuscript F retrospectively added in a red margin "of English *thegns*" after "ships" in this annal.[2020] Besides high-stationed potentates, such as Jarls Úlfr and Þórketill inn Hávi, and their retinues, other smaller-calibre Scandinavians returned from England too. *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis* ("The Chronicle of the Ramsey Abbey"; *c.* 1170 AD), for instance, mentioned individual Danes who sold their newly-acquired lands and left the country for home.[2021] Runic inscriptions commemorated the presence and enrichment in England of some of their fellow-vikings, who

> [...] were in an excellent position to bring elements of their English experience home to influence life at the homestead.[2022]

With so much attested Anglo-Scandinavian engagement going on, it is not at all surprising to find people called "(very) good *thegns*" in runic inscriptions and oral parlance until recorded on parchment, knowing that an identical notion of local elites as "good *thegns*"

2014 Lambert 2017, pp. 337–342.

2015 Bolton 2009, pp. 159–175.

2016 For Denmark, see, e.g., Ellis 2022; for Norway, e.g., Tveito 2007 and 2013; for, Sweden (more specifically, Vestrgautland), e.g., Runer 2012, pp. 557–559.

2017 Poole 2022, pp. 255–266.

2018 *Rétt hykk kjósa knóttu k a r l f o l k o k s v á j a r l a, af þvít eignum lofða Óláfar frið gó fu. Haralds arfi lét haldask hvardyggr ok sonr Tryggva lǫg, þaus lýðar þógu, laukjǫfn, af þeim nǫfnum* ('I think that both f a r m e r s a n d j a r l s knew how to choose rightly, because [the two] *Óláfrs* brought protection to people's properties. The very reliable heir of Haraldr [= Óláfr Haraldsson] and the son of Tryggvi [= Óláfr Tryggvason] let the just laws be upheld, which men received from those namesakes'; Sigv *Berv* 6; my emphasis). As far as I am aware, the parallelism between ON *karlafolk ok svá jarla*(*r*) and OE *ge eorle, ge ceorle* has not been approached before and is thus worth discussing in future research.

2019 Spejlborg 2022; Hjermind 2022, *passim*.

2020 *…for Cnut cing to Norðwegum of Englalande mid .l. scipum `Engliscra þegena´ ⁊ adraf Olaf cing of þan lande ⁊ geagenedi him þæt land* (*ASC*: 1028 AD [MS F]).

2021 *Historia Rameseiensis* pt III, chaps 76–77, pp. 140–144 (published in Macray 1886). See further Spejlborg 2022, pp. 348–351.

2022 Spejlborg 2022, p. 344.

proliferated in England in the same decades. On top of it, the commonality is reinforced by the fact that on both coasts such characters owed their socio-economic place in the hierarchy to aristocratic (though now encumbered) landed proprietorship, and how proprietary churches were built on both Anglo-Saxon booklands and Scandinavian odals.

To judge from the lack of semantical dynamics in the written period and eventual disappearance, ON *þegn* had retained some degree of exteriority. This fact neatly dovetails with the probably situational internalisation of a *thegnly* identity under a strong royal discourse in its homeland. Simply put, hypothetically, the removal of the forces feeding a *thegn*'s ascribed status led to a fossilisation of OE/ON *þegn*'s social meanings in both linguistic communities and eventual replacement by more relevant terms. In Scandinavia, thanks to a less culturally abrupt transition to the high Middle Ages, in England brought about by a foreign conquest, the social meanings lingered longer. But to judge from a lot of static formulaic use and occasional textual replacement by other native lexemes, ON *þegn* belonged to earlier times.

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In the end, both Aakjær and Nielsen seem to be correct in their own ways. In various contexts, Scandinavian *thegns* could be *bondehøvdinger*, as seems most likely in runic inscriptions, whom the early Scandinavian kingship sought to make into 'royal servants, members of the king's attendant nobility', as their royal "colleagues" succeeded in doing in the west. To summarise and return to research QUESTION 3 on what *thegns* can say about Anglo-Scandinavian Viking-Age interactions:

It is revealing that Archbishop Wulfstan non-coincidentally sought to explain the "true" (i.e. West Saxon) *thegnship* to the mixed society(-ies) that emerged out of processes that 'had made Northumbria [...] as much a province of Denmark and Norse Dublin as of England'.[2023] It is the present author's educated belief that *thegns* illustrate just how interconnected and easily traversed by social ideas the shared North-Sea chronotope could be and indeed was around the turn of the first millennium AD. Truly, as the skald Glúmr Geirason once poetically described it in a kenning, the sea was 'the bond of the lands' (ON *banda lands*).[2024]

By demonstrating this thesis in one particular case study, the author hopes to have demonstrated the practical value of not only revisiting old debates with new methodologies, but also how treating their objects cross-disciplinarily can yield new understanding of familiar subjects.

Granted, there may be shortcomings in this overarching interpretation, and they may be open to as much criticism as this study above has levelled at the "Aakjærian–Nielsenist" polemics. For this reason, it is probably best to leave the matter of *thegns* at the reached stage open to future research. One thing is certain: whichever route forthcoming enquiries shall take, new *thegnly* studies can not only further our knowledge about the Viking-Age in more than one country, but are also worth pursuing for their own sake. This becomes most evident inasmuch as there might still appear new evidence, as was made clear by the new runic finds in Venavalla while this study was being carried out.

2023 O'Brien 1996, pp. 331–332.
2024 Glúm *Eir* 1.

Appendix 1
Relevant sections of Archbishop Wulfstan's *Compilation on Status*

Appendix 1.1 *Geþyncðu*[2025]

	Textus Roffensis **(the 1010×1016 or 1020×1023 redaction)**	**Translation by Andrew Rabin (after *Textus Roffensis*)**	**Source of inspiration**	**Translation of source**
§1	*Hit wæs hwilum on Engla lagum þæt leod* ⁊ *lagu for be geþincðum,* ⁊ *þa wæron leodwitan weorðscipes wyrðe, ælc be his mæðe, eorl* ⁊ *ceorl, þegen* ⁊ *þeoden.*	In the laws of the English, it once was that people and law were ordered by status, and the people's councilors were treated with dignity each according to his rank, noble and commoner, thane and lord.	–	–
§2	⁊ *gif ceorl geþeah þæt he hæfde fullice fif hida agenes landes, cirican* ⁊ *kycenan,*[2026] *bellhus*[2027] *and burhgeat, setl and sundernote on cynges healle, þonne wæs he þanon forð þegenrihtes weorðe.*	And if a commoner prospered so that he had fully five hides of his own property with a church and kitchen, a bell house and fortified gate, a seat and an appointed role in the king's hall, then he was worthy of a thane's rights ever after.	–	–
§3	⁊ *gif*[2028] *þegen geþeah þæt he þenode cynge and his radstefne rad ón his hirede; gif se þonne hæfde þegen þe him filigde, þe to cinges utware*[2029] *fif hida hæfde,* ⁊ *on cinges sele his hlaforde þenode,* ⁊ *þriwa mid his ærende gefore to cinge, se moste syððan mid his forað his hlaford aspelian æt mistlicon neodan*[2030] ⁊ *his onspæce gerædan mid rihte, swa hwær swa he sceolde.*[2031]	And if a thane prospered so that he waited upon the king and rode on his business among his retinue,[2032] then, if he had a thane who followed him, who had five hides for the king's service and had waited upon his lord in the king's hall and had gone three times on his business to the king, then his thane afterward might represent his lord in various obligations with his initial oath and handle his litigation, wherever he must.	On *thegn*'s deputy: I Atr 1:2: *Gyf se hlaford sæcge þæt him naðor ne burste ne að ne ordal syððan þæt gemot wæs æt Bromdune, nime se hlaford him twegen getreowa ðegenas innan ðam hundrede* ⁊ *swerian þæt him næfre að ne burste ne he ðeofgyld ne gulde—buton he ðone gerefan hæbbe ðe ðæs wyrðe sy þe þæt don mæge.* Also recycled in II Cn 22:2: ⁊ *gyf ðegen hæbbe getreowe man to forað e for hine þæt swa sy; gyf he næbbe, ofga sylf his spæce.*	I Atr 1:2: 'If his lord asserts that he (the accused) has failed neither in oath nor in ordeal since the assembly was held at Bromdun, he (the lord) shall choose two trustworthy thegns within the hundred, and they shall swear that neither has his oath ever failed nor has he been convicted of stealing—unless the lord have a reeve who is qualified to discharge this duty'. Also recycled in II Cn 22:2: 'And if a thegn has a trustworthy man to give his oath of accusation for him, he may be allowed to make use of him; if he has not, he must begin his case in person'.
§4	⁊ *se þe swa geþogenne forwyrhtan næfde swore for sylfne æfter his rihte oððe his þolode.*	And he who did not have such a worthy representative swore for himself to his rights or forfeited his case.		
§5[2033]	⁊ *gif þegen geþeah þæt he wearð to eorle, þonne wæs he syððan eorlrihtes weorðe.*	And if a thane prospered so that he became a noble, he was afterward worthy of a noble's rights.	*Institutes of Polity*,[2034] (WPol 6.2) Be sacerdan 135: *And la, oft hit getimað, þæt þeowetlinge geearnað freotes æt ceorle, and ceorl wyrð þurh eorlgifæ þegenlage wyrðe and þegn wurð þurh cyninges gife eorldomes wyrðe.* 137: *Þonne hwilum þ[u]rh Godes gife, þræl wyrð to þegne sangere to sacerde, and bocere to biscpe.* Grið 21:2: *We witan þæt, þurh Godes gyfe, þræl wearð to ðegene and ceorl wearð to eorle, sangere to sacerde and bocere to biscpe.*	*Institutes of Polity*, 135. 'And lo, it often happens that a slave earns his freedom from a freeman of the lowest class, and a freeman of the lowest class becomes entitled to the rights of a thegn through an earl's gift, and a thegn becomes entitled of the status of an earl through a king's gift'. 137. 'Through God's gift a thrall became a thegn, and a freeman of the lowest class became an earl [/nobleman?], a singer a priest, and a scribe a bishop'.[2035] Grið 21:2: 'We know that, through God's grace, a slave has become a thane and a commoner become a nobleman, a choir singer become a priest, and a scholar become a bishop'.

2025 The version from *Textus Roffensis* was preferred, as CCCC MS 201 contains lacunae and scribal infelicities. Major textual variations indicated in footnotes.
2026 CCCC MS 201 omits *cirican* ⁊ *kycenan*.
2027 CCCC MS 201 reads *bellan*.
2028 CCCC MS 201 replaces *gif* with *se*.
2029 CCCC MS 201 omits *utware*.
2030 CCCC MS 201 omits *æt mistlicon neodan*.
2031 CCCC MS 201 reads *þorfte*.
2032 If, as suggested above (§5.3.2), OE *rādstefn* is indeed a borrowing from Old Norse, the clause is better understood as "he served the king and rode to [attend] a meeting at/with the royal court".
2033 §§5–6 omitted in CCCC MS 201.
2034 Found only in CCCC MS 201.
2035 Translation by Pons-Sanz 2007a, pp. 180 (n. 24), 187 (n. 43).

	Textus Roffensis **(the 1010×1016 or 1020×1023 redaction)**	**Translation by Andrew Rabin (after *Textus Roffensis*)**	**Source of inspiration**	**Translation of source**
§6	⁊ *gif massere geþeah þæt he ferde þrige ofer widsæ be his agenum cræfte, se wæs þonne syððan þegenrihtes weorðe*	And if a merchant prospered so that he fared three times over the open sea by his own means, he was afterward worthy of a thane's rights.	–	–
§7	⁊ *gif leornere geþeh*[2036] *þurh láre þæt he had hæfde and þenode Christe, se wæs þonne syððan mæðe and munde swa micelre wyrðe swa*[2037] *ðærto gebyrede, buton he forworhte þæt he þære hadnote notian ne moste.*	And if a student prospered by his learning so that he took orders and served Christ, he was afterward worthy of such respect and protection as was fitting thereto, unless he should sin so that he could not practice his ministry.	–	–
§8	⁊ *gif hit gewurde þæt*[2038] *man gehadedum oððe ælþeodigum ahwar gederode wordes oððe weorces, þonne gebyrede cinge and bisceope þæt hig þæt bettan swa hig rapost mihton.*	And if it so happened anywhere that someone injured one in orders or a stranger by word or deed, then it was the responsibility of the king and the bishop to remedy it as swiftly as they could.	–	–

Appendix 1.2 *Norðleoda Laga*

	CCCC MS 201 (the 1006×1008 redaction)[2039]	***Textus Roffensis*** **(the 1010×1016 or 1020×1023 redaction)**[2040]	**Translation by Andrew Rabin (after *Textus Roffensis*)**	**Source of inspiration**	**Translation of source**
§1	*Norðleoda cynges gild is* XXX *þusend þrymsa: fiftene þusend þrymsa bið þæs wergildes,* XV *þusend þæs cynedomes; se wer gebirað magum* ⁊ *seo cynebot þam leodum.*	*Cynges wergild is inne mid Englum on folcriht* XXX *þusend þrymsa:* XV *þusend ðrymsa byð þæs weres* ⁊ XV *þusend þæs cynedomes; se wer gebyreð þam magum* ⁊ *seo cynebot þam leodum.*	According to the folk-law of the English people, a king's wergild is thirty-thousand thrymsas: fifteen thousand thrymsas are for the man and fifteen thousand thrymsas are for the kingship. The personal wergild belongs to his kinsmen and the royal compensation belongs to the people.	*ASC*: 694 ad [MS A]: *Her Cantware gebingodan wiþ Ine* ⁊ *him gesaldon .xxx.m̄.,*[2041] *forþon þe hie ær Mul forbærndon.*	In this year the people of Kent made terms with Ine, and paid him thirty thousand [pence][2042] because they had burnt Mul.
§2	*Arc*[*ebiscop*]*es* ⁊ *æþelinges wergild is* XV *þusend þrymsa.*	*Æþelinges wergyld is* XV *þusend þrymsa.*	A nobleman's wergild is fifteen thousand thrymsas.	–	–
§3	*Biscopes* ⁊ *ealdormannes* VIII *þusend ðrymsa.*	*Bisceopes* ⁊ *ealdermannes* VIII *þusend þrymsa.*	For a bishop and an ealdorman, eight thousand thrymsas.	–	–
§4	*Holdes* ⁊ *cyninges heahgerefan* IIII *þusend þrimsa.*	*Holdes* ⁊ *hehgerefan* IIII *þusend þrymsa.*	For a Danish nobleman[2043] and a high reeve, four thousand thrymsas.	–	–
§5	*Mæssepegnes* ⁊ *worldþegnes* II *þusend þrimsa.*	*Mæssepegenes* ⁊ *woruldþegenes* II *þusend þrymsa.*	For a mass-priest and a secular thane, two thousand thrymsas.	–	–
§6	*Ceorles wergild is* CC ⁊ LXVI *þrimsa, þæt bið* II *hund scill'. be Myrcna lage.*	*Ceorles wergyld is* CC ⁊ VI ⁊ LX *þrymsa, þæt bið twahund scyllinga be Myrcna lage.*	A commoner's wergild is two hundred and sixty-six thrymsas, that is, two hundred shillings according to the law of the Mercians.	–	–

2036 CCCC MS 201 replaces *geþeh* with *wære*.
2037 Hereform CCCC MS 201 reads *þonne þam hade gebirede mid rihte, gif he hine heolde, swa swa he scolde*.
2038 CCCC MS 201 omits *hit gewurde þæt*.
2039 See the facsimile in Figure 3.
2040 See the facsimiles in Figures 4–5.
2041 MSS D and E read *þusenda* in place of *m̄*; MSS B and C read punda after *þusenda*; MS G reads meaningless *men*. Other *variae lectiones* are negligible.
2042 Whitelock and colleagues suggest "pence" as a certain reading, though textual variations across manuscripts are considerable (preceding footnote).
2043 See above, §4.4.2.3.

	CCCC MS 201 (the 1006×1008 redaction)[2039]	*Textus Roffensis* (the 1010×1016 or 1020×1023 redaction)[2040]	Translation by Andrew Rabin (after *Textus Roffensis*)	Source of inspiration	Translation of source
§7	*And gif Wilisman geþeo, þæt he hæbbe hiwisc landes* ⁊ *mage cyninges gafol forðbringan, þonne biþ his wergild* CCX *scill'.*	⁊ *gif Wilisc man geþeo, þæt he hæbbe hywisc landes* ⁊ *mage cynges gafel forðbringan, þonne byð his wergyld* CCXX *scill'.*	And if a Welshman prospers so that he possesses a hide of land and can pay the king's tribute, then his wergild shall be two hundred and twenty shillings.	Ine 32: *Gif Wilisc mon hæbbe hide londes, his wer bið* CXX *scill.; gif he þonne healfes hæbbe,* LXXX *scill.; gif he nænig hæbbeð,* LX *scillinga.*	If a Welshman possesses a hide of land, his wergeld shall be 120 shillings. If, however, he possesses half a hide, his wergeld shall be 80 shillings; if he possesses no land—60 shillings.
§7:1	*And gif he ne geþeo buton to healfre hide, þonne si his wer* LXXX *scill'.*	⁊ *gif he ne geþeo butan to healfre hide, þonne sy his wergyld* LXXX *scll'.*	And if he does not prosper to more than half of a hide, then his wergild will be eighty shillings.		
§8	*And gif he ænig land* næbbe ⁊ *þeah freoh sy, forgilde hine man mid* LXX *scill'.*	⁊ *gif he ænig land næbbe* ⁊ *þeh freoh sy, forgylde man hine mid* LXX *scll'.*	And if he does not have any land but is still free, then compensation for him shall be seventy shillings.		
§9	*And gif ceorlisc man geþeo, þæt he hæbbe* V *hida landes to cynges utware,* ⁊ *hine man ofslea, forgilde man hine mid twam þusend þrimsa.*	⁊ *gif ceorlisc man geþeo, þæt he hæbbe* V *hida landes to cynges utware,* ⁊ *man hine ofslea, forgylde man hine mid ii þusend þrymsa.*	And if a commoner prospers so that he possesses five hides of land for his obligations to the king and anyone kills him, compensation for him shall be two thousand thrymsas.	Ine 24:2: *Wealh, gif he hafað* V *hida, he bið syxhynde.*	The wergeld of a Welshman who holds five hides of land shall be 600 shillings.
§10	*And þeah he geþeo, þæt he hæbbe helm* ⁊ *byrnan* ⁊ *golde fæted sweord, gif he þat land nafað, he bið ceorl swa þeah.*	⁊ *þeh he geþeo, þat he hæbbe helm* ⁊ *byrnan* ⁊ *goldfæted sweord, gif he þæt land nafaþ, he byþ ceorl swa þeah.*	Yet even if he prospers so that he possesses a helmet and a coat of mail and a gold-plated sword, if he does not possess the land he will still be a commoner.	–	–
§11	*And gif his sunu* ⁊ *his sunu sunu þæt geþeoð, þæt hi swa micel landes habban, siððan bið se ofspringe gesiðcundes cynnes be twam þusendum.*	⁊ *gif his sunu* ⁊ *his suna sunu þæt geþeoð, þæt hy swa micel landes habbað, syððan byþ se ofspring gesiðcundes cynnes be twam ðusendum þrymsa.*	And if his son and his son's son prosper so that they have sufficient land, then the offspring will be of the rank of *gesith* at two thousand thrymsas.	Possibly, Ine 50–51, 54 which contain OE *gesīðcund*, specifically opposed to *cierlisce* in Ine 54.	–
§12	*And gif hi þæt nabbað, ne to ðam geþeon ne magon, gilde man cirlisce.*	⁊ *gif hig þæt nabbað, ne to þam geþeon ne magan, gylde man cyrlisce.*	And if they do not have it and cannot acquire enough, their compensation will be that of a commoner.		–

Appendix 1.3 *Mircna Laga*

Textus Roffensis (the 1010×1016 or 1020×1023 redaction)[2044]		Translation by Andrew Rabin (after *Textus Roffensis*)	Connects to
§1	*Ceorles wergyld is on Mercena lage* CC *scill'.*	According to the law of the Mercians, a layman's wergild is two hundred shillings.	Norðleod 6
§1:1	*Ðegnes wergyld is syx swa micel, þæt byð* XII *hundred scill'.*	The wergild of a thegn is six times as much, that is, twelve hundred shillings.	
§2	*Ðonne byð cyninges anfeald wergild six þegena wer be Myrcna lage, þæt is* XXX *þusend sceatta,* ⁊ *þæt bið ealles* CXX *punda.*	According to the law of the Mercians, then, the king's individual wergild is the wergild of six thegns, that is, thirty thousand sceattas, which is one hundred and twenty pounds in all.	Norðleod 1
§3	*Swa micel is þæs wergildes on* [*folces folcriht be Myrcna Laga.*][2045]	So much is wergild in the folk law of the people, according to the law of the Mercians.	
§3:1	*And for ðam cynedome gebyrað oþer swilc to bote on cynegylde.*	And for the kingship there is a second compensation owed equal to that for the king.	Norðleod 1
§4	*Se wer gebyreð magum* ⁊ *seo cynebot þam leodum.*	The wergild belongs to his kinsmen and the royal compensation to the people.	

2044 See the facsimile in Figure 6. Differences from CCCC MSS 201 and 190 are scribal only, save §3.
2045 Omitted in the Textus Roffensis and supplied from CCCC MS 190.

Appendix 2
Heriot Tariff in II Cn 71[2046]

	Text	Translation	Textual parallel	Closest fit in *Domesday Book*	Closest fit in wills	Probable recipient in the will	Deviations from II Cn 71
§71	*And beon ða herigeata swa gefundene swa hit mæðlic sy.*	Heriots shall be fixed with due regard to the rank of the person for whom they are paid.	I Cn 3a: 'In the first instance, amends for breach of its protection shall be made to the church, in accordance with the nature of the offence and also in proportion to the status of the church' (*Bete man ærest þone griðbryce into þære cyricean be þam þe seo dæd sy* ⁊ *be þam þe ðære cyricean mæð sy*).	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
§71a	*Eorles.*[2047] *Eorles swa ðerto byrie, þæt syndon eahta hors, IIII gesadelode* ⁊ *IIII unsadolede,* ⁊ *IIII helmas* ⁊ *IIII byrnan* ⁊ *VIII spera* ⁊ *swa fela scylda* ⁊ *IIII swyrd* ⁊ *twa hund mancus goldes.*	An earl's heriot. The heriot of an earl, as is fitting, shall be eight horses, four saddled and four unsaddled, and four helmets and four byrnies and eight spears and as many shields and four swords and 200 mancuses[2048] of gold.	–	–	S 1498	king	300 mancuses and four armlets instead of 200 mancuses
§71:1	*Kyncges ðeines.*[2049] *And syððan kynges ðægnes heregeata*[2050] *ðe him nyxste syndon—IIII hors, II gesadelode* ⁊ *twa ungesadelode,* ⁊ *II swyrd* ⁊ *IIII spera* ⁊ *ealswa feola scylda* ⁊ *helm* ⁊ *byrnan* ⁊ *fitig mancus goldes.*	The heriot of a king's thegn. And further, the heriots of king's thegns who stand in immediate relation to him shall be four horses, two saddled and two unsaddled, and two swords and four spears and as many shields and helmets and byrnies[2051] and 50 mancuses of gold.	–	–	S 1487	probably king[2052]	no armour or helmets; 100 mancuses instead of 50; a ship
					S 1492	probably king[2053]	no swords; two helmets and two byrnies instead of four; a nearly complete ship
					S 1526	probably king[2054]	no armour or helmets; 200 marks of red gold, two silver cups, three estates instead of 50 mancuses
					S 1534	not stated	no armour or helmets, no money; two horses instead of four but also ten mares and ten colts
					S 1536	king[2055]	no spears, shield, armour, or helmets; 200 mancuses instead of 50; a hundred wild horses

2046 Reproduced after Attenborough 1922 who used CCCC MS 383 as his main manuscript. Non-scribal and extra-grammatical variations indicated in footnotes. For another tabular form, see Brooks 1978, pp. 86, 88 (figs. 2 and 3). Reproduced after Attenborough 1922 who used CCCC MS 383 as his main manuscript. Non-scribal and extra-grammatical variations indicated in footnotes.

2047 Rubric. Occurs only in CCCC MS 383.

2048 See above, n. 820.

2049 Rubric. Occurs only in CCCC MS 383.

2050 *Heregeata* occurs only in CCCC MS 383.

2051 Body armour of mail coat.

2052 The testator addressed his liege as *leof hlaford* (lit. dear lord).

2053 The testator is a bishop.

2054 The testator is a bishop.

2055 Not stated explicitly but King Æthelred's confirmation of this will has survived (S 906).

	Text	Translation	Textual parallel	Closest fit in *Domesday Book*	Closest fit in wills	Probable recipient in the will	Deviations from II Cn 71
§71:2	*Oðres ðeines.*[2056] *And medemra ðegen—hors* ⁊ *his gerædan* ⁊ *his wæpna oððe his healsfang on Westsæxan,* ⁊ *on Myrcen* II *pund,* ⁊ *on Eastengle* II *pund.*	The heriot of another thegn. And the heriot of ordinary thegns shall be a horse and its trappings and his weapons or his healsfang in Wessex, and in Mercia £2, and in East Anglia £2.	I Cn 3:2: '…and in the case of a church of medium rank, [amends for violation of the protection shall be made] by the payment of 120 shillings (… ⁊ *medemran mynstres* [*griðbryce*] *mid* CXX *scill*'…)	Custom of Berkshire (*DB* I, fol. 56c [BRK B10]): 'At his death, a thane or a King's household man-at-arms sent to the King as death-duty all his arms and horse, one with a saddle, another without a saddle; but if he had dogs or hawks, they were presented to the King, to accept if he wished' (*Tainus uel miles regis dominicus moriens, pro releuamen dimittet regi omnia arma sua . ⁊ equum . I . cum sella . alium sine sella sed si essent ei canes vel accipitres, presentabantur regi ut si uellet acciperet*). Also customs of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and Nottinghamshire (?) (below, §71:5)	S 1519	Archbishop Stigand	extra armour and byrnie; pedantically, those could be part of "his weapons" (together with the sword and spear), otherwise not specified in II Cn 71:4; no money
§71:3	*And kyncges ðegnes heregeata inne mid Denum ðe his socne hæbbe—*IIII *pund.*	And among the Danes the heriot of a king's thegn who possesses rights of jurisdiction shall be £4.	–	–	–	–	–
§71:4	⁊ *gyf he to ðam kyncge furðor cyððe hæbbe—*II *hors, an gesadelod* ⁊ *oðer ungesadolod,* ⁊ *an*[2057] *swyrd* ⁊ II *spera* ⁊ *twegen scyldas* ⁊ *fiftig mancus goldes*	And if he stands in a more intimate relationship to the king, it shall be two horses, one saddled and the other unsaddled, and one sword and two spears and two shields and 50 mancuses of gold.	–	–	S 1534	not stated	two swords instead of one; four spears instead of two; four shields instead of two; no money; different horses
§71:5	⁊ *se ðe læsse habbe* ⁊[2058] læsse maga sy—II *pund.*	And for the man who is inferior in wealth and position the heriot shall be £2.	AGu 3: 'If anyone accuses a man who belongs to a lower order than that of king's thegn' (*…gif mon ðone man betyhð, ðe bið* læssa maga *ðone se cyninges ðegn*…)	Customs of Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire (*DB I*, fol. 280c [NTT S1–3[and 298 [YKS C40]): 'If he [thane] has only 6 [manors] or less, he pays death-duty to the sheriff, 3 silver marks [= £2], wherever he may live, within the Borough or outside' (*Si* [*tainus*] *habet . VI .* [*maneria*] *tantum uel minus, uicecomiti dat releuationem . III . markas argenti . ubicunque maneat in Burgo uel extra*).	–	–	–

2056 Rubric. Occurs only in CCCC MS 383.
2057 An occurs only in CCCC MS 383.
2058 Words *læsse habbe* ⁊ occur only in in CCCC MS 383.

Appendix 3
Þegn in Old English and Old Norse Corpora

As expressed in §1.7.2.2, the inclusion of all corpora entries of OE/ON *þegn* in this book would have turned it into a lexicographical catalogue. Not supplying such a list would, however, deny further researchers a potentially valuable resource. Therefore, the raw data on which this book stands are appended below in the form of spread-sheet files uploaded to the digital repositorium of the University of Gothenburg. All six files are availble for download at <https://hdl.handle.net/2077/81920> by choosing and clicking the corresponding link. In each file, sheet 1 is the catalogue of entries I worked with; sheet 2 enumerates the spelling variants; sheet 3 provides a list of the consulted editions (all bibliographical references are to them). Worth repeating is that neither file is posited as the final assortment of all relevant entries, merely those I have been able to identify.

A separate supplementary appendix was added for both corpora each. For Old English, for their illustrative value, all mentions of *thegns* in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, utilised in §3.4.5.1, were compartmentalised in a separate spread-sheet file. For Old Norse, all *thegnly* runic inscriptions were accordingly listed separately, for ease of use and reference.

Appendix 3.1 *Þegn* in Old English

Appendix 3.2 *Thegns* in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

Appendix 3.3 *Þegn* in Old Norse

Appendix 3.4 *Thegns* in Runic Inscriptions

Appendix 4
Localisation of *Ministri* as Beneficiaries in Royal Diplomas

The spread-sheetfile below is a spreadsheet of all *ministri* (or people of a comparable standing) known from royal diplomas, of whom there exist motivated educated guess as to where they received royal grants of land and where they attended royal assemblies. For the colour codes used in the spreadsheet, see the provided legend in the file. Due to the impractical size of the spreadsheet if printed, it was decided to upload the original file online.

Appendix 5
Domesday *Thegns*

The spread-sheet file below is a spreadsheet of all *thegns* mentioned in *Domesday Book*. Identifying and listing them down went according to the procedure as follows:

1. the index Volume 35 in the Phillimore edition of *Domesday Book* was consulted;
2. all Domesday entries *s.v.* "thane (tainus)" at p. 233 were visited one-by-one in the digital version of the Phillimore edition from the repository of the Hull University; for Yorkshire folios, the *Domesday Explorer* CD-ROM was used;
3. vills from the relevant entries were then sought in PASE Domesday in the "Location:Vill" attribute;
4. profiles of individuals associated with a given relevant vill and who got explicitly called *thegns* in each relevant entry were copied into the spreadsheet.

Due to the impractical size of the spreadsheet if printed, it was decided to upload the original file online.

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Abbreviations

Series:

AH	Acta Humaniora
AS	Acta Scandinavica
ASPR	The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collaborative Edition
AST	Anglo-Saxon Texts
AnSS	Anglo-Saxon Studies
BAR BS	British Archaeological Reports: British Series
BARHSS	British Academy and Royal Historical Society Series
BdAP	Bibliothek der Angelsächsischen Prosa
BCCT	BRILL's Companions to the Christian Tradition
DOML	Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library
EA	Editiones Arnamagnæanæ
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS o.s.	Early English Text Series Original Series
EETS s.s.	Early English Text Society Supplementary Series
ERGA	Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde
ÍF	Íslenzk Fornrit
MA	The Middle Ages Series
MC	The Medieval Countryside
MLP	Medieval Law and its Practice
MNL	Medieval Nordic Laws
NL	Northern Library
NMW	The Northern Medieval World: On the Margins of Europe
NT	Norrøne Tekster
NW	The Northern World: North Europe and the Baltic *c.* 400–1700 AD: Peoples, Economies and Cultures
OHM	Oxford Historical Monographs
OMT	Oxford Medieval Texts
OPMT	Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics
PC	Penguin Classics
SEDKA	Sammlung Englischer Denkmäler in Kritischen Ausgaben
SH	Subsidia Hagiographica

SEHB	Studies in the Early History of Britain
SEHBI	Studies in the Early History of Britain and Ireland
SEMA	Studies in the Early Middle Ages
SOLMED	Skriftserien Skogs- och Lantbrukshistoriska Meddelanden
SUSF	Samlingar Utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet
TASS	Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series
VSNRTS	Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series

Journals and Periodicals:

APS	*Acta Philologica Scandinavica: Tidsskrift for Nordisk Sprogforskning*
AfNF	*Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*
Anglia	*Anglia: Journal of English Philology*
ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England* (presently *Early Medieval England and its Neighbours*)
ANS	*Anglo-Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference*
EHR	*The English Historical Review*
EcHR	*The Economic History Review*
Futhark	*Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies*
Graphosphaera	*Graphosphaera: Writing and Written Practices*
HR	*Historical Research*
HSJ	*The Haskins Society Journal*
HT (D)	*Historisk Tidsskrift (Danmark)*
HT (N)	*Historisk Tidsskrift (Norge)*
HT (S)	*Historisk Tidskrift (Sverige)*
JEGP	*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JMH	*Journal of Medieval History*
Kuml	*Kuml: Årbog for Jysk Arkæologisk Selskab*
LSE	*Leeds Studies in English*
RMN Newsletter	*Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter*
Scandia	*Scandia: Tidskrift för Historisk Forskning*
SJH	*Scandinavian Journal of History*
SS	*Scandinavian Studies*

Other Abbreviations:

NS	New Series

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